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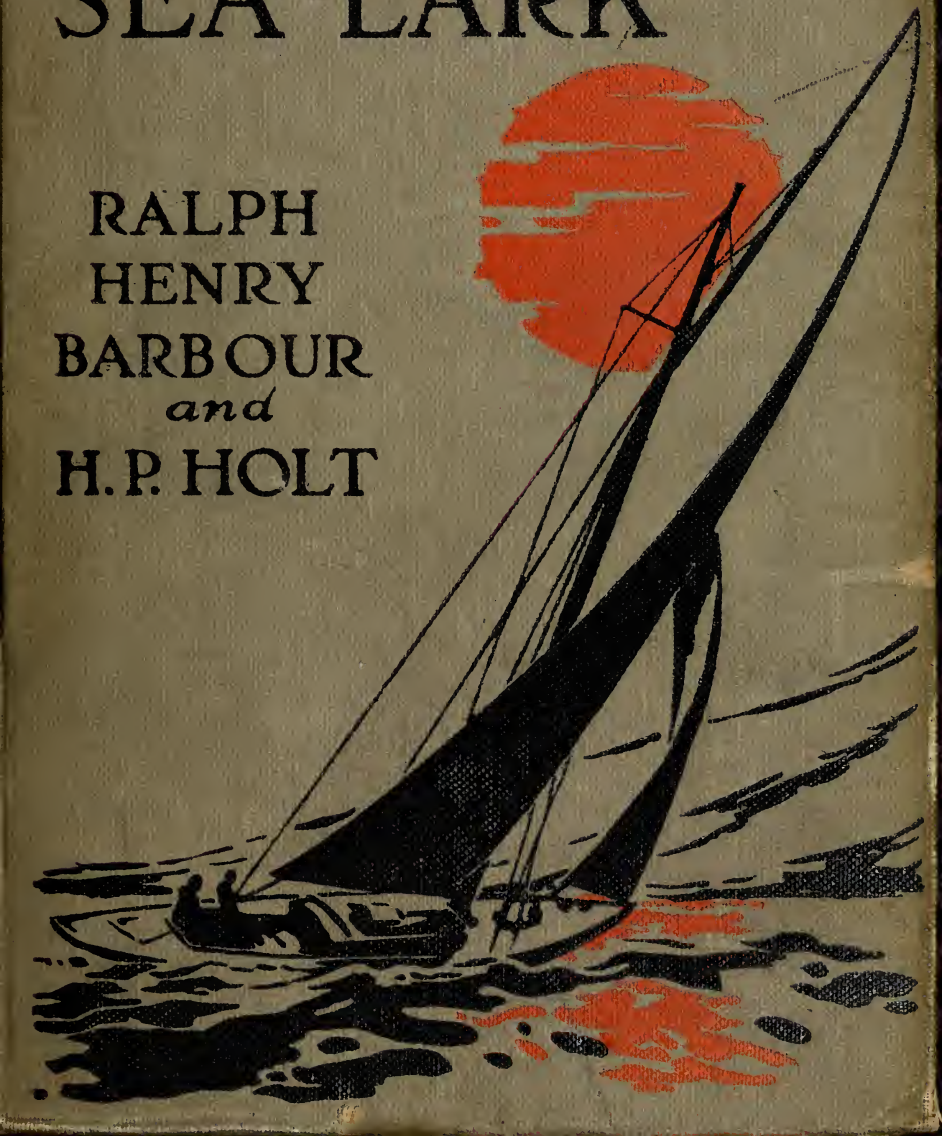
MYSTERY of the SEA-LARK

RALPH HENRY BARBOUR
and
H. P. HOLT



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THE MYSTERY OF THE SEA-LARK

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"The moment I jump swing her 'round"

THE MYSTERY OF THE SEA-LARK

BY

RALPH HENRY BARBOUR

AND

H. P. HOLT

ILLUSTRATED BY

C. M. RELYEA

NEW YORK

THE CENTURY CO.

1920

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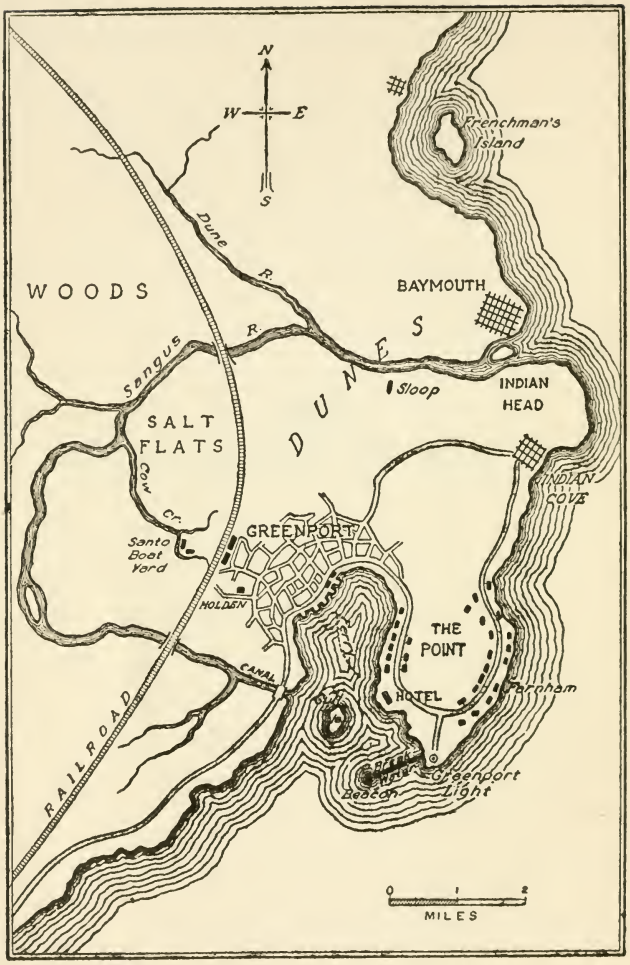
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THE MYSTERY OF THE SEA-LARK

CHAPTER I

CAP'N CRUMBIE IS SURPRISED

"A LUCKY thing so few of the boats were out when the storm came up!" said Jack Holden. "I guess they 'd have had a pretty hard time of it yesterday."

"Cap'n" Crumbie nodded in satisfaction. "Only one missing," he replied. "And why? *Why?* 'Cause Cap'n Crumbie told 'em what to expect. Not far out, I ain't, as a rule. There was nigh a dozen o' 'em wanting to get away to the grounds when I told 'em the gale was coming. And most o' 'em took my advice and stayed safe an' snug at home. 'T ain't that I 'm wanting to blow my own trumpet, as the saying is, but facts is facts. Bob Sennet laughed at me and put to sea. *Laughed* at me,

mind you! Obstinate as they make 'em, Bob is—or should say *was*—just like his father afore him. If he had n't been so obstinte he 'd ha' been here to-day, alive an' well. An' instead o' that, see where he is!"

"Where, Cap'n?" asked the boy, gravely.

The Cap'n dropped his voice to a sepulchral rumble. "Fathoms deep, son! Fathoms deep somewheres out there, he and the *Ellen E. Hanks* together; aye, and all hands as well. Fathoms deep; mark my words!"

Jack, suppressing a disrespectful grin, glanced seaward in the direction of the Cap'n's pointing hand. The scene there held no suggestion of tragedy. The storm of the last two days was over. Since early morning the leaden skies had turned to blue and the fresh, salty breeze that swept in from the broad Atlantic was but the tag-end of the terrific gale that had lashed the waters of the harbor and raced, shrieking, up the quaint, narrow streets of the town. Now, instead of the storm-wrack, a few white clouds sailed eastward, and, in place of the fury of tormented waters, the harbor and

the sea beyond the breakwater reflected the blue of the heavens in their dancing, white-capped waves.

A mile away, Gull Island was fringed with creamy foam, and, farther still, at the tip-end of the Point, the squat stone lighthouse gleamed snowy-white against the clear horizon. Washed and swept by rain and wind, the little Massachusetts fishing-town of Greenport looked bright and clean this May afternoon. The fishing-schooners, some at anchor, some lying snug at the wharves, were drying their sails in the warm sunlight.

Cap'n Crumbie viewed them approvingly as, with Jack at his side, he paced to and fro on Garnett and Sayer's wharf, his short, slightly bowed legs working with the regularity of a pendulum, six paces nor'east, then six paces so'west. He had traveled a good many miles in that fashion in the last twenty years, for he was watchman at Garnett and Sayer's, and this stretch of clear space on the busy wharf was the Cap'n's quarter-deck. He was, let it be confessed, no ancient deep-sea mariner, al-

though he had all the marks of the ocean-going skipper—leathery, crinkled face, with crow's-feet at the corners of his twinkling eyes, skin tanned deeply from long exposure to the salt sea air, a fringe of yellowish-white whiskers, and a deep growl of a voice. True it is that he had been a captain, but captain only of a center-board sail-boat in which, before he had given up the precarious life, he had taken out pleasure parties for a day's fishing—including chowder—or for a run around the Head. But everybody did n't know that, more especially the "summer folks," and among the latter he held the reputation for being not only the most dependable weather-prophet along the coast but a perfect example of the old-time ship's captain, with experience gathered from Iceland to Fiji, from Seattle to Siam. And many a good yarn Cap'n Crumbie could spin, too, of his adventures in far-off climes. Indeed, he had related some of them so frequently that he had long since grown to believe them!

Jack had spent all of his sixteen years in Greenport and so knew the Cap'n for what he

was, a kind-hearted, eccentric, and amusing old character.

"But," he said, suppressing a smile, "if Bob does come back he 's pretty sure to have a tremendous catch. The mackerel are in and the water 's boiling with them, they say."

"Maybe, maybe," blustered the Cap'n; "but what good 's a load o' mackerel to a drowned man? Terrible bad weather it was yesterday. Don't know when I 've seen such a snorter. Guess the last one was three years ago, the time your father was robbed."

"I remember," replied Jack. "There was a fierce gale that night, was n't there? Poor Dad was wet through when they brought him home. He 's never talked much about the robbery, Cap'n, and I never really understood just what happened that night. But I do know that poor Dad 's never been quite the same since."

"And no wonder," answered the Cap'n. "He was hard hit, Jack. More 'n a thousand dollars went, as near as I recall."

"Twelve hundred and forty. I asked him

once and he told me, but he said I was n't to talk about it again."

"Well, by gravy, 't was a shame, anyway!" said the Cap'n, emphatically, with a belligerent glance at Barker's wharf across the slip.

"Was n't it queer that they never caught any one!" Jack observed.

"That 's what Simon Barker always said," replied the Cap'n, dryly, "but when he says that, he 's trying to suggest that Samuel Holden knows more about the affair than he cares to tell."

Jack flushed slightly, and threw his shoulders back.

"I had forgotten that," he said quietly. "I remember, though, that it was you who found Dad. You did n't see anybody about, of course?"

Cap'n Crumbie shook his head.

"And I don't know as they might n't have suspected me, if it had n't so happened that the new Baptist parson was with me, and they had to take his word."

"Well, what 's your theory of it, Cap'n?" Jack asked.

Cap'n Crumbie paused in his sentry-go to stuff shreds of tobacco into the much blackened bowl of his old brier pipe and then, with deftness born of practice extending over many years on the exposed wharf, struck a match, cupped it in both hands under the lee of a broad shoulder turned away from the breeze, and puffed contentedly for a moment.

"Well, if I don't know what happened that night, there ain't no one as does," he said at length, with a slightly judicial air. He had told the story a good many times, not because there was anything specially stirring about it, but because he was directly concerned and because it happened to be the nearest approach to an adventure ever happening to him in all his three score years—if one excepted the time when he fell overboard from his sail-boat and, after a few thrilling seconds, was ignominiously pulled back to safety by one of his passengers, who passed a boat-hook through his trousers. "Your father and Simon Barker were partners,

as you know, as fish-merchants. 'T was a pity Samuel Holden ever joined up with a feller like Barker, because nobody ever did any good harnessed to a mean cuss like that. They started in a small way, with one schooner, the *Grace and Ella.* There she is, now, lying up against Barker's wharf. And many a thousand-dollars' worth of fish has been landed from over her side since then. At the time I 'm speaking of, she 'd come in with a big haul, that fetched high prices. A day or two after that the gale sprang up. And it *was* a storm. Never since I was in the Indian Ocean—umph—er—er—"

Cap'n Crumbie coughed discreetly, remembering that his audience was "home folks," and then resumed quite without embarrassment:

"Well, as I was saying, it was a gale that fair knocked Greenport galley-endwise. It started all of a sudden, raining cats and dogs, and the wind was so strong you could n't stand up. We lost two of our best fishing-vessels that day; windows were blown in and roofs ripped off; and a bunch o' little sail-boats lying at their moorings were blown clean out to sea. Some of

'em never were found again. One or two got smashed up on the rocks. One of 'em went 'way up 'round Indian Head, drifted up the tide way o' the Sangus River, and lodged on the sand-dunes there. Then the sea piled the sand up, changed the course o' the river, and she 's been left high and dry ever since."

"You mean the old *Sea-Lark?*" put in Jack.

The watchman nodded.

"I know where she is," observed the boy. "I 've climbed aboard her several times. She 's lying a couple of hundred yards from the river now."

"Well," Cap'n Crumbie went on, "that night, just when the gale was starting, your father left the office with the money he 'd drawn from the bank to pay off the crew of the *Grace and Ella.* It was in a canvas bag, notes and silver together, and he did n't like leaving it at the office all night. I was coming down High Street, when I met the parson, and we walked along together a ways. It was hard going and all-fired dark, when we turned down Wharf Street and fell right over your father. He was lying all in a

heap on the sidewalk. I did n't know it was him at first, mind you, because it was so dark. Parson and me tried to get him onto his feet, but he was all limp, like a wet string, and so we carried him into Simmons's house, and there we saw who it was. When he recovered a bit he told us he 'd been robbed. He had no idea who 'd done it. All he knew was that he was hurrying along, with his head bent down, when some one laid hold of him. Then he got a smashing blow on the head, and did n't know anything more until he came to in Simmons's kitchen."

"And the police never found any clue?" Jack asked.

"Not as I ever heard of. But Simon Barker went nearly crazy. You 'd have thought, by the way he fussed, that Sam Holden was the biggest criminal unhung. Barker lost his head. He 's that mean he hates to see a mosquito walking on his wall-paper 'cause it 's wearing out the paper. You 'd have thought it was him that had been half killed instead of Sam Holden. He swore 't was a put-up job, and that your

father had done it himself somehow, to get away with the money. And mighty unpopular he made himself by saying such things. Some of us told him what we thought o' him, next day, and then he began to calm down a bit, but by that time the thief had covered up his tracks, and nobody has ever heard any explanation o' what happened, from that day to this. It cost your father his partnership in the business, 'cause he had too much pride to go on working with a man who had as good as called him a thief, and he sold his home to replace the money that was stolen. I did hear that Simon Barker came near dropping dead when your dad handed it to him. You see, if things had been t' other way round, Barker could n't have brought himself to do such a thing in a month o' Sundays, and so he could n't understand any one else doing it. Your father was n't obliged to pay the money to Barker, o' course. If a thing gets stole, it 's stole, and that 's all there is to it. But your father wanted to clear his name. And he did, don't you ever doubt it, Jack! Maybe Barker still has a sneaking notion that it was a

put-up job, but if he does I can't see how he figures your father made anything by it!"

"How *can* he?" protested Jack.

Cap'n Crumbie shook his head, and cast a glance in the direction of the tug *Simon P. Barker,* which was being coaled noisily at its owner's wharf thirty yards away.

"I ain't no Shylock Holmes, son," he said. "Maybe he thinks what he says, and maybe he says what he don't think. I should n't faint right now if some one told me here and now that Barker knew more than your father did about the robbery."

"You don't mean—"

"No, Jack, no. I ain't saying Barker had anything to do with it, because, to give him his due, he was n't never convicted o' theft. I b'lieve he 's honest, and if he is, it's only because he 's too mean to give his time to the Government, in prison."

The conversation was interrupted by the approach of a stranger, who, after looking across the harbor, addressed the watchman.

" Pardon me," he said, "but will you tell me

where I can find the ferry to East Greenport?''

''There ain't no ferry, and there ain't never been one,'' replied the watchman, ''though 't ain't for the want o' customers. Sometimes in the summer I 've been asked that same question a dozen times a day.''

''How can I get over there?'' the stranger asked, looking dubiously at the intervening mile of water. ''There is no trolley and it is rather a long way to walk with this grip.''

''A little ways round that corner,'' replied the watchman, pointing off the wharf, ''you 'll find Hinkley's stable, and you 'll get a carriage there.''

Cap'n Crumbie watched the man speculatively until he had disappeared, but Jack was looking out at the stretch of water between the wharf and the distant hotel, with a puzzled expression.

''I say, Cap'n,'' he said a few moments later, ''did you mean it when you said lots of people want to be ferried across to the Point during the summer?''

''Why, yes, son,'' replied the watchman.

"You never heard me say anything that was n't the truth, did you?"

Jack smiled and almost made some reference to the Indian Ocean; but other thoughts were buzzing at the back of his brain.

"Why has n't anybody ever started a ferry, then, if there 's need of one?" he asked.

Cap'n Crumbie put his head on one side and looked down at the ocean.

"Ever swallow sea-water, Jack?" he asked.

"When I was swimming, many a time."

"What does it taste of?"

"Salt, of course."

"Salt is right. But there 's all manner o' things in it besides salt—even gold, I 've heard say. It 's there, for the taking, and no danger o' the ocean running dry. Well, did you ever hear o' any one in Greenport starting to take salt or gold out o' the sea. No. O' *course* you did n't. Don't ask me why. I don't know. But I reckon it 's about the same reason why nobody ever started to run a ferry across to the Point from here. Either they did n't think of it, or it 's too much trouble."

"When the summer cottagers come back and the hotel opens, I guess there would be plenty of business," Jack mused. "You 'd think the hotel alone would make it pay."

"Probably 't would," the Cap'n agreed.

"I 'm sure of it," said Jack, thoughtfully; and then, as his eyes fell on something away out to sea, beyond the breakwater, he suppressed an exclamation and glanced amusedly at Cap'n Crumbie, who was engaged in a contest with his obstinate pipe.

"Too bad about Bob Sennet!" the boy said. "You think the *Ellen E. Hanks* must have foundered with all hands, don't you?"

"Aye, with all hands," declared Cap'n Crumbie, wagging his head. "Fathoms deep, they must be now, floating around among the fish they went after. I 'm not denying they'd ha' made a big haul o' mackerel, and they 'd ha' had the market all to themselves. But there, obstinate folks have to pay for their obstinacy sooner or later! I warned Bob, but 't was no use."

"There 's a boat coming in now," said the

boy, pointing to the craft, which, with all sail set, was rounding the end of the breakwater, her hatches evidently full, for her hull was low. "If she is n't the *Ellen E. Hanks* she 's awfully like her."

Cap'n Crumbie shot a glance over the harbor, and a look of mingled surprise and chagrin crossed his rugged face.

"Humph!" he said finally. "Some folks are like Jeff Trefry's old tom-cat for luck. Jeff tied the cat up in a sack and dropped him off the wharf and afore he 'd more than turned around that cat comes marchin' into the kitchen with a flounder in his mouth!"

CHAPTER II

GEORGE SIGNS ON

A FEW minutes later Jack left the watchman, and made his way through town toward the cottage in which he lived. And as he went, his mind busied itself with the idea of the ferry suggested by Cap'n Crumbie.

Jack Holden was as care-free as any boy of his age in Greenport. For him, life so far had contained little but healthy sport and amusement, and the question of earning money had never concerned him. Nor was it the wish of his father that it should. Yet, despite his natural light-heartedness, Jack had a level head. The time would come, and before very long, when he must face the problem of winning a place for himself in the world. It had been decided that, if it could be arranged, he was to spend another two years at High School, after

which he would seek a position. But two years is a long time, and Jack was by no means certain that he would not have to turn out and become a wage-earner long before his education was completed. For his father was now a very different man from the old Samuel Holden. Since the robbery, troubles had piled themselves on his shoulders somewhat seriously. First had come the loss of Jack's mother, from which Mr. Holden had never really recovered. Then had followed that blow on the head inflicted by the thief, which had necessitated numerous visits to a costly eye specialist, in order to preserve his sight. Finally, with his business taken away from under his feet, he had been in financial straits ever since. After selling his home to make good the missing money, he had taken a small cottage on the outskirts of Greenport and gone to work as a bookkeeper for Garnett and Sayer, the fish-packers. Had his wife lived, with her indomitable spirit and unending courage—characteristics which, fortunately, she had bestowed upon her son—she would have buoyed him up and kept alive his old ambi-

tion. But now his worries told on him, and it was that fact which caused Jack to wonder sometimes whether his own education would ever be completed as he would like it to be.

If, he reflected, as he walked home, he could only start that ferry and so bring a little grist to the mill, it would at least help to relieve his father of some of his anxiety. But one cannot make bricks without straw. And he was face to face with the cold fact that he had no boat, nor any chance of acquiring one. At home, he looked over his sum total of worldly possessions. There was four dollars and twenty cents in the savings-bank. He had a nickel and two dimes in his pocket. Also, he owned a silver watch, of little value, as most of its works were missing. There was a penknife, which he had bought after much careful deliberation, and there was—well, little else save rubbish, worth nothing when it came to a question of raising enough money to buy a boat suitable for Holden's Ferry.

"Holden's Ferry!" Jack repeated aloud, smiling a little at the sound. The name had

an agreeable ring to it. It would be fun. And at the same time it might be fairly profitable fun.

In the evening, when his father returned, Jack immediately introduced the subject uppermost in his thoughts.

"Dad," he began impulsively, "how can I get a boat, twenty feet long, or something like that—one that will hold ten or a dozen people and won't leak more than about ten buckets of water an hour."

"Eh? What 's that?" asked Mr. Holden, in surprise.

"I 've got an idea, and I want a boat, Dad," replied Jack. "I thought—perhaps—somehow—"

"I wish I could buy you one, my lad," said Mr. Holden, a trifle dejectedly, "but you 'll have to wait till my ship comes in."

"I don't want it for pleasure—not altogether, that is," the boy declared.

"Not for pleasure? Then what on earth—Are you thinking of setting up in the shipping business?"

Jack chuckled.

"I may do a little freight-carrying," he said with mock seriousness, "but the passenger trade is what I was thinking of chiefly."

"Modest youth! You 'll want to go into steam for that, though," said Mr. Holden, jokingly. "It is a pretty tall proposition for a youngster of your age. Have you fixed on just what ports you are going to trade at?"

"Only Greenport, Dad. But I 'm in earnest."

Still slightly amused, Mr. Holden stroked his chin and eyed his son inquiringly.

"Well, what is this wonderful scheme of yours?" he asked.

"I want to run a ferry between Garnett and Sayer's wharf and the hotel landing on the Point," the boy replied. "There is no way of getting across except by hiring a boat or walking around, or taking a carriage; and plenty of people would pay a dime to be run across there in a ferry-boat."

"Yes, but—"

"Wait a minute, Dad. I 've had this in my

mind all the afternoon. Cap'n Crumbie tells me there are lots of people who inquire for the ferry in the summer. He says there never has been one, but that is no reason why there should n't be one now. Perhaps I would n't make *lots* of money at it, but I 'm old enough to help you a bit, and I don't want to loaf all through vacation, because I know you 've had worry enough and that you 're going to have a tough time keeping me in school until I finish."

"Well?" observed Samuel Holden, rather vaguely.

"I was wondering," continued the boy, "whether you could manage somehow to buy me the sort of boat I 'd need. Almost anything would do that was half-way decent—and clean, too, because summer folk would n't want to get into her if she was n't."

Mr. Holden shook his head slowly. "I dare say it might work out all right, Jack," he said, "and a little more money would come in very handy, but you 'd better get the notion out of your head, son, before you waste any more time

thinking about it. I could n't afford to buy you even a dory, and it 's about six times too far across the water at that point to row, anyway."

"All right, Dad," said Jack, quietly. He realized that there was no use in asking his father to perform impossibilities. Later in the evening Mr. Holden noted an expression of quiet determination in the lad's face such as he had so often seen in Mrs. Holden's when, things not going well, her resourceful brain and stout heart had set themselves the task of getting affairs back in order.

The next day was Saturday, and shortly after breakfast, there being no school, Jack and his chum, George Santo, started off on a hike toward the sand-dunes and salt-flats which lay for miles to the north of Greenport. This region the boys had made their playground ever since they were old enough to go about together. It was on the bold summit of Indian Head, a rocky barrier which for centuries had kept the encroaching sea at bay, that they had built their first wigwam out of driftwood, and stood, at the mature ages of nine and ten re-

spectively, adorned with feathers and armed with spears, guarding their hunting-grounds from the hated palefaces who never seemed to approach much nearer than Greenport. From there they let their eyes wander in imagination over vast herds of buffalo, moose and antelope grazing peacefully on a far-stretching prairie. At times, as the hated palefaces all seemed to be fully occupied elsewhere, phantom palefaces had to blunder upon their hunting-grounds, and these intruders were hastily despatched or led captive to the driftwood wigwam, there to be held as hostages. There were terrific battles up on Indian Head, but somehow or other, whatever the overwhelming odds with which they were faced, the two lone braves invariably came out from the encounters unscathed. But the wigwam was now scattered to the four winds of heaven. The boys had grown too old for that sort of make-believe; yet their love for the region of dunes and marsh endured.

On this particular morning they headed over toward the salt-flats above Cow Creek, and then followed the course of the Sangus River

toward the sea. They must have trudged half a dozen miles by this circuitous route before Jack, standing on the rippled summit of a wind-swept dune, drew his companion's attention to the fact that the Sangus had changed its sandy course.

"It must have been caused by the flood and the last gale," he said. "See, the water has come right across this low bit and—and—say, George, the old sloop, the *Sea-Lark*, was lying nearly buried just along here. I should n't wonder if the river has swept her away now. Come on, let 's see how the old dear is."

Ten minutes' tramping brought them to the place, and each gave a cry of joy when they saw that the sloop lay exactly as she had lain for three years. But she had escaped the effects of the recent gale by a narrow margin only, for the Sangus had swirled over its banks, eating its way through the sand to a new course, until it now flowed within twenty feet of the *Sea-Lark*.

The boys climbed aboard the derelict, and with their legs dangling over the side, with

healthy appetities attacked a parcel of sandwiches.

"I 'm glad she 's still here," said Jack. "Do you remember when I was a pirate king last summer and made you walk the plank? We 've had lots of fun on this sloop. If she 'd been lying a mile or so nearer Greenport, crowds of kids would have been swarming all over her and she 'd have been broken up."

George nodded, and poked the last of the sandwiches into his mouth.

"Talking of boats," Jack went on, "where do you suppose I could get one, George"

"What do you want her for? There 's my dory. You can have that any time you want."

"Thanks, George," Jack replied. "But a dory is n't just what I *do* want."

Then he explained.

"I don't know. I guess a boat like that, one you could use for a ferry, would cost money," declared the other, when Jack had finished.

"I thought maybe, your father being a boat-builder, you might know of some way I could

manage it," said Jack. "There 's plenty of time, because it 's early in the season yet, and maybe I 'll find what I want somewhere."

"If you do start the ferry I want to help. May I?" asked George.

"Why not?"

"You 'll be skipper and I 'll be mate," said George, laughing.

"You must n't laugh at the captain—that is, not after you 're properly appointed mate—" said Jack, "or I 'll order you put in irons. That 's what they always do. Yes, laugh now, if you like, but wait till I 'm your captain. But why wait? See here, George Santo, were n't you making an application to me for a job just now?"

"Yes, sir," replied George, meekly touching his cap.

"How old are you?" This, brusquely, as befitting a fearsome master mariner.

"Fifteen, sir."

"Umph! Pretty young for my class of trade. What 's your rating?"

"Chief mate, sir."

"Got your certificate?"

"I left it at home, sir."

"Umph! Very careless of you. Well, you want to sail with me, eh? What about the compass? Can you box it?"

"I 'm a pretty fair boxer, sir."

"Not that sort of boxing, chump! All right, you 're engaged. *Now,* Mr. Mate, laugh at me if you dare!"

Whereupon the mate promptly laughed, and Jack as promptly hurled him overboard into the raging billows of sand. Jack then strolled aft and stood for a few moments, measuring the distance between the embedded sloop and the river.

The mate, clambering aboard again, shouted something which fell on deaf ears. Again George spoke, and again Jack made no answer. At last, however, he emerged from his abstraction, and, "Come here," he called.

George obeyed, and Jack passed his arm through that of his friend.

"Now, use your brain," he said. "How far is it from here to the stream?"

"Thirty feet," the other guessed. "Why?"

"Wrong. It 's nearer twenty. And don't ever ask the captain 'why' anything. He 's in supreme command; see? Tell me what is to prevent us digging the *Sea-Lark* out of this and getting her afloat."

"Afloat!" gasped the mate. "Why, you can't do it! She 's stuck here."

"Why can't I do it?"

"Well," began the mate, dubiously.

"You 'll be disrated if you don't use more intelligence," snapped the skipper. "What are shovels for but to dig with?"

"Yes, but—" began George.

"But what?"

"Well, if you got her afloat she 'd only sink. Her timbers will all be rotten."

"Show me a rotten timber!" said Jack. "I don't mean these planks that have got broken on deck. I mean in the hull. She 's as sound as a bell. A boat like this would take years and years to rot. She 'd need some calking, I guess, but that 's what I engaged you for, is n't it?—while I sit in my deck chair and give or-

ders. George, honestly, I believe it could be done."

"But she is n't yours to float," parried the mate, "nor to use after you get her afloat."

"That 's true," agreed the skipper, frowning. "But you have got a way of raising difficulties since I signed you on. Who does she belong to?"

"She used to belong to Mr. Farnham," replied George. "He 's a New York man with pots of money, who lives over on the Point in the summer. The sloop was in my father's boat-yard for repairs the summer before she broke away and got stranded here."

"Well, do you suppose he wants her? I don't believe so."

"Don't know," observed George, doubtfully.

"Well, if he does want her, why does n't he come and get her? And what could he use her for? A coal cellar, or what? She 's abandoned, I tell you."

"If you took her away from here, which you could n't do, anyway," observed the younger boy, "you 'd be committing ship theft."

"What 's that?"

"It 's a dreadful offense, worse than piracy. I believe they hang you for it, or something."

"I certainly don't want you to get hanged," said the captain. "Good mates are scarce; and they always hang the mate, because he 's engaged to make himself useful in little ways like that. But it would n't be ship theft if I wrote a letter to this Mr. Farnham and got his permission, would it?"

"I suppose not."

"Of course not. Where does he live?"

"My dad will have his address."

"Well, don't forget to ask him for it, and I 'll write. He can only refuse."

George, beginning to awake to the possibilities of the plan, cast a more critical eye over the stranded sloop.

"I would n't be surprised if you were right," he said at length. "We *might* get her into the water."

"It would n't be exactly easy, because she 's pretty big," Jack admitted, "but it would be worth trying, anyway. What a prize if we got

her, though! She 's thirty foot over all, if she 's an inch. And ten—no, twelve-foot beam. The only thing is, if she did float, we could n't row her very well."

"There 's bales of junk gear up at our yard," put in George. "I suppose her mast got broken off in the gale when she stranded. I think I could get that fixed all right, though. There 's an old spar that came out of her when she was refitted. I don't know why it was taken out, but it looks all right. We can find an old mainsail and jib somewhere. Even if they need a bit of patching, they 'll do."

"The boat is the chief thing," Jack mused. "The rest will be easy, once we get her. I 'm going to send that letter off to-day. Let 's go home now and do it."

Letter-writing was not an occupation which, ordinarily, filled Jack with joy. But this was not an ordinary occasion. After a first attempt which he regarded as a failure, the boy produced a missive that was both frank and polite, and then, feeling that he did not stand a ghost of a chance of having his request granted,

posted it. Later, he and George walked to the boat-yard, there to consult George's father, Tony Santo, on the question of moving the *Sea-Lark* from her sandy bed. Tony promised to go down the river and look the sloop over, the following day, and was as good as his word. Jack and George accompanied him in his sailing-dory, and to the delight of the boys the boat-builder declared that there ought not to be a great deal of difficulty in getting the sloop off, though he cautiously declined either to have anything to do with such operations or allow his son to, unless definite permission was received from Mr. Farnham. He pointed out, however, that the accumulation of sand in the sloop's cabin would have to be removed before any attempt could be made at shifting her. Her companionway door had evidently been open when she grounded, with the result that in the three years which had since elapsed the space below deck, a roomy cabin twelve feet by nine, had been half filled with the fine white sand.

During the next three days the boys, taking

a shovel with them, employed themselves busily at this task until the last of the undesired ballast was removed. Jack now began to keep an anxious lookout for the postman. Four days elapsed, and still no reply arrived. Thursday came, and on returning from school he found an envelope bearing his name, on the mantel-shelf. His fingers unsteady with excitement, he tore it open and read:

DEAR SIR:

I thought my old sloop must have been broken up by now. Yes, she is still my property, and if you want her you are welcome to her, on one condition. If you get her afloat, you must take me for a sail in her some day.

Yours sincerely,

CHARLES FARNHAM.

CHAPTER III

BACK TO THE WATER

STUFFING the letter into a pocket, Jack reached for his cap, and hurried out to summon his crew, consisting of George Santo.

"All hands on deck!" he said. "Mr. Mate, we 're going to start work right away. There are only three weeks of May left, and before long we 'll have Holden's Ferry going."

"Aye, aye, sir," replied the mate, "if ever we *do* get her floated."

"*If!*" cried Jack. "You talk like a codfish. Of *course* we 're going to get her floated! Before we do another thing, though, I 'm going to hold a war council with your dad. He knows best how we can tackle the job."

They hurried to the boat-builder's yard, where Tony was found at work.

"Mr. Farnham has given me that sloop,"

Jack cried as he approached. "See, here 's his letter."

Tony's features developed a broad smile, and he glanced through the note.

"So you 'll soon be setting off on a journey around the world, or thereabouts, eh?" he remarked at last, banteringly.

"Well, maybe about half-way, or perhaps as far as Greenport breakwater," Jack returned; "but you know, Mr. Santo, we can't do much till we get your help."

"Well, what do you want me to do?" asked Tony good-humoredly, putting down his hammer.

"I don't want to bother you too much," said Jack, "but you said that if we got stuck you would give us a bit of help."

"Why, yes, I 'll run over there in the dory some Saturday and help you to launch her, when you 're ready."

"Thank you. That will be a tremendous help. Shall we dig a channel down to the water and float her out that way, or dig the sand away from her bow—she is lying bow-on toward the

river, you know—and get her out with a winch?"

"I 'll take a winch. That will be easier. I 'll find a place on the opposite bank of the river where I can moor the winch, and then run a cable across the water to the sloop. We 'll drag her out when you 've done enough spade-work. But mind, you want to get all that sand clear away from her sides, and make a nice slope up from her bow so that she won't stick when the winch begins to haul on her. How long will that take you? Till next fall?"

"I hope not. We could n't very well manage it by next Saturday. That would only give us two days. But we 'll be ready for the winch the Saturday after."

"All right," replied Tony. "We 'll make that a date."

To any one less enthusiastic than her proud new owner, the sloop would not, perhaps, have looked such a priceless possession. There is something peculiarly desolate about the appearance of a wreck at any time, and, at least up to the time when the Sangus had again changed

its course, the *Sea-Lark* had looked even more desolate than she would otherwise have done, because she was so far from the river. The water had left her canting over heavily to port, her stump of mast, a yard long, sticking up. On the port side her deck was now about level with the sand; her starboard side, raised four or five feet higher, had formed a barrier against which a solid bank of the restless sand had settled. Had she been an old boat and needing paint at the time she came to grief, decay might have left its stamp upon her in the three years she had lain there; but it so happened that her oaken beams and hard-pine planking were as sound at the time of the accident as on the day when they were first put into her, while the fact that she had received a double coat of paint only two months before, helped her further to resist the weather. She was not, therefore, really a wreck, as nothing of any consequence, except the mast, was broken.

Taking turn and turn about, the two boys worked strenuously, first removing the sand that had silted up against her starboard side.

It was no light task, for the drift ran the whole length of the sloop, and the lads' backs were aching and their limbs weary before they seemed to have made any impression on it. When the skipper called a final halt, however, they were well pleased with the result of their arduous labors. Nevertheless, Jack realized now for the first time how great was the task he had set himself, and how hopeless would be his efforts without the kindly assistance of Tony with the winch.

In three days the boys had entirely removed the drift, and then began to dig down around the sides of the vessel, to release her from the grip of the sand there. George proved not only a willing but an extremely useful helper. Though not so tall as his chum, he was strong, and gave promise of developing into an unusually powerful man. But it was the spirit with which he threw himself into the task that Jack appreciated as much as anything. Just before the date of the appointment with Tony, once when they were resting, perched on the side of the *Sea-Lark,* George surveyed the piles

of sand which they had removed in the past week.

"We only want one thing now," he said thoughtfully, "to make us both thoroughly happy."

"What 's that?"

"A peach of a wind-storm, to fill up all the holes we've been digging! If that happened, I don't believe we 'd have the pluck to start all over again."

"Don't suggest such an awful thing," cried Jack, "or I 'll smite you with a belaying-pin! By the way, George, I can't do that."

"Oh, I *am* so sorry!" said the other. "Why not?"

"Because there does n't seem to be a belaying-pin on board. We 'll need one or two, won't we? The skipper always thumps people on the head with a belaying-pin, particularly the mate. There 's something about a marlinespike, too, is n't there? I 'm not quite sure what a marlinespike is, but I think I club you with it when there is n't a belaying-pin handy."

With a deft movement of his body, the mate

got behind the skipper and neatly tipped him overboard into the hole they had so painstakingly dug; nor was the captain allowed to climb on board again until the mate had extracted a promise that he would at all times be treated in a humane manner when they were far out on the bounding ocean.

During the last of the preparations for Tony's operations their spirits rose greatly, for it began to look as though the sloop merely needed a gentle tug to slide her away from the bed in which she had so long lain. At school on Friday Jack struggled hard to keep his attention riveted on his lessons, but it was an effort in which he failed utterly; for the launching on the morrow of the good ship *Sea-Lark* seemed a matter of infinitely greater importance than the problems that were put before him.

It was late that afternoon when the boy finally declared that all was ready for the great ceremony. He and his chum had carried out Tony's instructions to the letter, even searching about on the bank of the river for drift-

wood, which they dragged to the sloop and placed in position just under her nose. That night Tony was informed of their readiness for his part in the program, and the boat-builder bade them be prepared for an early start next day, as it might take until late in the afternoon to get through.

Not very long after sunrise next day Jack leaped from bed and looked anxiously out at the window. It seemed as though the Fates were going to be kind to him, because the weather was perfect for the day's operations. The boy was too impatient to eat much breakfast, and after a hurried meal went round to the Santo boat-yard, where he found Tony and George already moving the necessary gear into the sailing-dory—much strong manila rope with blocks and tackle, a powerful hand-winch, several heavy planks, a number of rollers, and a bucket of grease. When these were aboard, the sail was hoisted, and the dory dropped down the creek to the river. There, as the stream was not over wide, the oars had to be used, and the dory was rowed some four miles,

Tony pulling steadily all the time, and the boys taking turn and turn about at the other oar.

"It 's hard work against the wind," said Tony, "but we shall feel the benefit of it coming back."

It was only a little after nine o'clock when they reached the spot where the *Sea-Lark* lay, and some hours were left before high water was due. First Tony went ashore and inspected the work the boys had already done.

"That 's good," he declared unhesitatingly. "She ought to come off like a wet fish slides off a plate. Lend a hand with those rollers and boards in the dory, and we 'll fix her."

Already Tony seemed to take as keen an interest in the salvage operations as the boys had done. He soon had everything ready on that bank of the Sangus, and then crossed the river to moor the winch in the sand there, so that it would haul without moving. This was not easily accomplished, for the loose sand gave poor anchorage. When, however, it was done to his satisfaction, the cable was run across the water

and made fast to the sloop. Tony sent the boys back to start hauling, while he stood by the *Sea-Lark* to "navigate" her. Jack and his chum each seized a crank and began to tighten the cable. It came easily enough until the drag of the sloop began. Then they managed a bare-half-turn only. Putting forth every ounce of their strength, they struggled to start the sloop on her journey toward the water, but it was beyond them. The *Sea-Lark* refused to glide with fairy footsteps down to the river after her long rest ashore. Tony meanwhile was heaving at the side of the boat to loosen her keel in the sand, but when he saw the joint efforts of the boys were unequal to the task, he beckoned them to fetch the dory across.

"She seems to be glued there," he declared, "but that glue will have to come unstuck, if it takes us the whole day to do the trick. Let 's see if all three of us working at the winch can get her to start."

Tony rolled up his sleeves, put the boys together at one crank, and applied his own strength to the other.

"Now, lads," he said, "give her all you 've got. Heave!"

There was a back-breaking moment of straining, cracking muscles.

And then something happened. The *Sea-Lark* reluctantly began to move.

Click-click-clickety-click, went the winch.

"Easy, now," ordered Tony. "Rest a few minutes. She 'll come all right, and we have plenty of time."

From that moment the launching of the sloop, though slow, was a certainty. A dozen times Tony had to make the trip across the river to adjust the planks and rollers beneath the boat's keel, but she came up the slope without mishap.

"My word, she looks big!" Jack exclaimed when he had climbed to the top and was lumbering along on her side, down to the water's edge.

"What did you take her for?—a canoe?" Tony laughed. "She won't look as big, though, when she gets into the water. Still, a thirty-foot sloop is all you two will want to handle in a breeze."

When their prize was within a foot of the water, Tony went over her with a calking-iron and mallet, plugging up the worst of the leaky places with oakum so that she could safely be taken up the river as far as the boat-yard without danger of sinking on the way. Jack watched this performance with a critical eye.

"Is she very bad?" he asked with some anxiety.

"Why, no," replied Tony. "She 's not what you might call seaworthy, with these seams wide open, but you 're bound to get that. I did n't expect to have much trouble with her hull, and I must say that, considering all things, she 's in pretty fair condition. Just the same, I guess there 's enough work on her to keep you busy for a week or so."

"I don't care if it takes us all summer! Yes, I do, too," said Jack. "I want to get her shipshape in a month or so if possible."

"Well, I 'm not saying you can't do that," replied Tony, surveying the hull with a professional gaze. "But let me tell you this: you 've got your work cut out; that is, if you mean to

put her into first-class shape. Still, even as she is she 'd fetch a nice little sum, once we get her down to the yard where people come looking for boats."

"It 's very nice to hear you say that, Mr. Santo," replied Jack, "but I feel as proud of her already as though she were a steam-yacht, and it would have to be a very tempting offer to make me part with her."

"There!" said Tony at last, "I think she 'll do now. Some water is bound to slop into her on the way home, but she won't go back on us and sink, anyway. Let 's get her launched."

A few more turns on the winch fetched the *Sea-Lark* down into the river, and Jack could not suppress a shout when he saw her actually afloat. She did not look quite so large as when lying high and dry on the top of the bank, but she was a fair-sized craft.

A tow-rope was fastened from her to the dory, and then the smaller boat's sail was hoisted, Tony going alone in his dory, the boys traveling on the sloop to steer. This was a somewhat delicate operation, for the channel

was narrow in places, and there were several bends. During this part of the run the mate stood in the bow, armed with a long pole, to ease her prow away from the occasional shallows into which they ran, and Jack remained at the wheel, glowing with pride in his new possession. For, helpless though she was without spars, rigging, or gear, she was his, and it was not difficult for him to adorn her with imaginary sails bellying to the wind as she careened over, leaving a foamy trail astern. It seemed almost unbelievable to him that such a thing as this could have happened. Never, during the time when he and his friend had played at being pirates on the sloping deck of the stranded derelict, had he dreamed that the day would come when the water would be flowing beneath her keel once more and that the hand which steadied her wheel would be his.

"Ahoy, there!" he called gaily to the mate.

"Aye, aye, sir!" responded George, glancing astern, over his shoulder.

"Shin up aloft and put a two-reef in the main-

tops'l," the skipper barked, endeavoring to imitate the deep tones of Cap'n Crumbie.

Deserting his post for a moment, George ran to the mast stump, and clung to it like a bear hugging a pole.

"Belay, there!" shouted Jack, laughingly. "Get back on to your job, or—"

The skipper never completed his sentence. Slipping quickly back to the nose of the boat, George arrived there at the precise moment when the *Sea-Lark* ran upon one of the numerous shallows which threatened to impede her progress all along the route. The sloop came to a standstill with a jerk, and George, his hands outstretched to grasp his pole once more, took a graceful dive straight over the side. He could swim like a young otter, but there was no need for that, as the water came up only to his chest, and he soon climbed back on board, there to withstand the playful taunts of his father and of the captain, who condemned him to twenty years' imprisonment in the chain-locker and ordered him to be deprived of his

wages for life, for absenting himself from the ship without leave.

Together the lads managed to push the sloop off again, and the journey was resumed, but soon they reached the bend bringing them into Cow Creek, and there the dory's sail again became useless, so it was lowered and Tony and George rowed the rest of the distance, the exercise preventing the boy from suffering any ill effects from his ducking. George was nevertheless thankful by the time they approached his father's boat-yard, for the sloop hung behind like a load of lead, the wind, which was now against her, adding to the work. She was gently eased up on to the bank of the stream, there to lie until her various minor ailments had been attended to and until she was declared fit for a new career of adventure.

CHAPTER IV

THE TRIAL TRIP

IMMEDIATELY after school on the following Monday afternoon Jack and his chum hastened to what they were pleased to call their "dry-dock." Although Tony Santo had calked the worst of the cracks between the planks under the sloop's water-line before he actually launched her, she had taken in a good deal of water during her journey along the Sangus River and up Cow Creek. It was obvious, therefore, that several afternoons would be taken up with the task of filling the numerous small crevices along her hull, although the boat-builder assured them that the swelling of the wood after she had been afloat a few days would to some extent remedy this trouble.

The boys went about their task in a thoroughly businesslike manner. With coats off

and shirt-sleeves rolled up, and wearing the oldest trousers they could find, they applied themselves diligently and intelligently to their work. Tony, who took a genuine interest in the affair, devoted an hour or two to them on the first day, teaching the boys how to use the calking-iron and mallet, how to lay the thin strip of oakum along the defective seam, and how to ram it into the cavity without injuring the boat itself. Also, they learned to distinguish between a seam which needed calking and one which did not.

After putting them through their short apprenticeship, the boat-builder sat on an upturned box, lighted his pipe with deliberation, and for a while watched his pupils at work.

"Steady, there!" he said. "Don't try to go too fast. You 're not out to make a record. Not too hard with the mallet, or you may do more harm than good. That 's the style!"

As the tide had receded it had left the vessel canting over on her starboard side, and Tony had told the repair gang to take one seam at a time, working from stem to stern as far as

possible, for the *Sea-Lark* was high and dry only at low water.

"Now I guess you 're all right, and I 'll leave you to it," said Tony at length. "How long are you going to keep it up?"

"Till supper-time," replied Jack, tapping away industriously with the mallet in his right hand, while with his left he held up the small iron which rammed the oakum home.

"You 'll be wanting some paint for this boat soon," said Tony, with a mysterious smile. "Now, if you keep on with what you 're doing till it 's time to knock off for supper, I 'll—I 'll make you a present of all the paint you need."

Jack, wondering what the joke was, turned to the boat-builder.

"Do you mean that?" he asked. "What 's the catch?"

"You 'll find out," replied Tony. "What does that mallet weigh?"

"About four pounds," guessed Jack.

"Three and a half," said Tony. "And what does that other little thing—the iron—weigh?"

"Oh, a quarter of a pound."

"Just right," said Tony. "Now, which arm will get tired first, the one you are holding the mallet with, or the one you 're using for the iron?"

"Which do you think, George?" asked the skipper, with caution.

"Why, the mallet arm," suggested George promptly. "That thing weighs about ten times as much as the iron."

"That 's my guess too," said Jack.

"Well, well, we 'll see," said Tony, the smile having developed into a broad grin as he sauntered off to his own work in the near-by boat-yard.

For a while the boys were too intent on their occupation to carry on much conversation. They worked side by side, each taking a separate seam, and each glancing occasionally at the work of the other.

"Have you ever done any calking before?" Jack asked when they had been plugging at it for some time.

"Not a calk!" replied the youthful mate.

"It 's fun, is n't it?"

"Lots!" replied George. "Which arm are you having most of the fun in—the right or the left?"

Jack stole a glance at his companion, who was now standing with both his arms hanging down.

"Your dad said this little iron only weighed four ounces," observed Jack, lowering the implement, and rubbing his shoulder. "What 's happened to the thing? It seems to weigh more than the mallet now."

Just then Tony strolled back and caught them both resting.

"Are you going to buy that paint, or am I?" he asked quizzically.

"I 'm afraid it 'll have to be me," replied Jack. "I could keep on with the hammering, buit it 's holding up this little iron all the time that bothers me."

"It tries anybody, men included, at first," said Tony. "Don't do too much to-day and then you won't be too stiff to work to-morrow. You 'll soon get used to it, though. There 's a lot of scrubbing to be done on the deck, so I 'd

switch off and get busy with the soap and water for a change."

The inside of the cabin was just as the boys had finished scraping it out with a shovel, so here considerable time had to be spent before a coat of paint could be put on the woodwork. Where the paint was coming from Jack, so far, had not the least notion. He had already discovered, to his dismay, that paint was an extremely expensive article for one whose total capital did not touch the five-dollar mark, especially when pounds and pounds of the stuff were needed to put even a single coat on sparingly. There were precisely two reasons why he would not attempt to get the necessary money by borrowing from George. One was that he had a constitutional dislike to borrowing. The other was that George would be unable to lend it; for George had not yet learned the wisdom of reserving a little of his spending-money for a rainy day. There was a way out of the difficulty, of course, for the skipper of the *Sea-Lark*. He could find a job somewhere. But that would take precious time. He was

prepared to do it if necessary, but hated the idea of postponing the preparation of the sloop for her maiden voyage until he could earn enough money to give her a new "dress." However, there was plenty to occupy his attention for the present, and he was an incurable optimist, so he felt convinced the paint would roll up in some unexpected fashion, after all.

Next day both Jack and the mate were stiff in the shoulder, but they set to work as early as possible in the afternoon, doing an hour's calking first and then turning to with the scrubbing-brushes. There were two sleeping-bunks besides lockers in the cabin, all of which had to be swabbed down and then scrubbed. In the middle of this performance, while Jack was on his knees, working away in a corner, he noticed that the sound of the other scrubbing-brush had ceased, and turned to ascertain the cause. He discovered his henchman lying, apparently fast asleep, in one of the bunks.

"What 's the matter? Are you all right, George?" he asked anxiously, springing to his feet.

"Eh? What 's that?" queried George, as though just awakened from deepest slumber.

"Tired?" asked the skipper.

"Why, no; not specially," replied his chum.

"What 's the idea, then? Come on."

"Well, I 've just remembered something," replied George. "I signed on this ship as chief mate, did n't I? Well, the chief mate is the navigating officer, is n't he? I 've got to know all about the currents and the rocks and charts and stars, and nothing was said, when I was engaged, about me having to scrub the—"

"George Santo," the skipper began in his best deep voice, "if you 're not out of that in ten seconds you 'll know more about stars than you 've ever seen in your life. I 'm going to empty this bucket of water over that bunk when I say three. One—two—"

With a second to spare, the mate displayed remarkable agility in descending, and became desperately busy once more, to avoid the captain's wrath.

It was a full week before the last of the calking was done, and Tony, after a careful inspec-

tion, declared it to be perfectly satisfactory. He added a touch here and there where a little more oakum was needed, and then provided a bucket of tar and a brush, telling Jack to daub her hull over completely, beneath the water-line.

Although still far from being finished, the *Sea-Lark* began to assume the part of a real boat in Jack's estimation. She was no longer the leaky old sieve which he and George had played on through two summers. He was realizing, for the first time in his life, the real satisfaction which comes from conscientious labor. The calking of those leaks in the seams had been done with infinite care and at the cost of many an ache and pain. His hands were blistered and calloused from work to which he was not accustomed, but it was with a growing sense of pride in his handiwork that he viewed the sloop. At times he was a little impatient, for the days were rushing past and June was fast approaching, but nevertheless he did not shirk any of the harder toil which he might have left half done. It was his firm determination that the

boat should be as satisfactory as he could make her. Nor, despite his joking, was George Santo inclined to skip the less pleasant portions of their task.

After the bottom of the sloop had been tarred, and the whole of the deck and cabin scrubbed, Jack, on the advice of Cap'n Crumbie, invested in a bundle of sandpaper, and another three days were spent scraping and smoothing down the woodwork, which had become roughened in places by long exposure. Cap'n Crumbie walked from the wharf to see how they were getting on with the *Sea-Lark,* and Jack took him into consultation on the pressing subject of paint.

The watchman meditatively ran a stubby forefinger through his whiskers.

"Aye, she 's bleached for fair," he said. "She won't sail no better with paint on her woodwork, but she 'll look a world different. As you say, though, paint 's expensive, and it 'll take a tidy bit to give her even one thin coat."

"Well, it does n't have to be the *best* kind of paint, Cap'n," Jack said. "If only I could get

hold of some old stuff, it would do. I 'm not so very particular about the color."

"*I 've* got it!" cried the watchman, suddenly, beaming. "You go up and see Dan Staples, the house-painter. Tell him I sent you, and he 'll fix you up all right. I remember now they 've got a tub up there where they throw all the old dried-up skins and bits of waste paint, same as they do in all paint shops. It won't cost you much. I guess he 'll be able to let you have all you want for about a dollar. It 'll be a bit o' trouble, but as you ain't too particular about the color, you could n't get anything better to suit you. Put it in an old pan and melt it over a fire. Then strain it, and you 'll have as good paint as you 'd want. Maybe it 'll be reddish, or maybe it 'll be grayish; and maybe you won't be able to find a name for it; but that won't break your heart, huh?"

"That 's fine!" said Jack. "I 'll go up and see him now."

The captain of the *Sea-Lark* found Mr. Staples in his workshop, and when Jack explained his mission the painter filled a generously sized

can with scraps and skins out of the tub, for which Jack paid him fifty cents.

The rest of the afternoon was devoted to the task of melting this down over a small stove in the boat-yard, and after straining it the boys found they had many pounds of a brownish-colored paint, a little nondescript as to hue, perhaps, but nevertheless, as Cap'n Crumbie had prophesied, perfectly good paint. The tarring along the sides of the sloop below the waterline had been finished off evenly, and the boys now proceeded to slap a coat of the Staples mixture from the top of the black line to the top of the low rail which ran the full length of the *Sea-Lark's* deck; and by the time this had been accomplished the sloop was indeed transformed into something of her old glory. Jack would have turned next to the painting of the cabin and the deck itself, but here Tony wisely interfered.

"You don't want to do that till the rough work 's all finished," he said, "or everything will get scratched up. I 've got the mast to

put in, and there 's a week's carpentering ahead of you yet. You 'll want two or three new cleats. And what about belaying-pins? They 're all gone."

"Oh, yes, we must have at least *one* belaying-pin!" exclaimed Jack, with a humorous glance at the mate. "Tell me, Mr. Santo, are n't they the little round sticks that go into the mast rail there, to belay the halyards on?"

"That 's the idea; but they 've all got lost. You can easily make them."

"And I want the marlinespike," chirped George. "I think every mate should have at least one of those if the captain is going to have half a dozen belaying-pins."

"Do you know what a marlinespike is?" queried Tony, puzzled.

"It 's something a sailmaker uses, is n't it?" asked George.

"Yes, a metal spike about six or seven inches long."

"Just what I need!" said George.

"I guess there 's enough carpentering work

to keep you busy for a while," said Tony, "unless you 're more handy with tools than George is."

"George Santo," said Jack, severely, when they were alone a moment later, "you 're a fraud, and I could have you arrested."

"What for?" asked George, with a grin.

"You shipped on this vessel as a fully qualified mate and highly skilled carpenter. You heard what your own father said about you."

"Well, sir, I needed the money," pleaded George.

"This company is run on business lines, Mr. Mate," declared the captain. "You 'll either learn to do your share of carpentering right now or I 'll sue you for false pretenses."

"Please, sir, when I go across in the ferry as mate do I have to pay ten cents fare, too?" asked George.

"Silence!—or I 'll clap you in irons!" roared the skipper. "Come on, and use your head. I 've never made a cleat in my life, and I suspect you know more about that sort of thing than I do. Let 's make a start."

Two or three short pieces of oak were found in the boat-shed, and after the third or fourth attempt the boys managed to fashion sufficient serviceable cleats to replace those which had been broken. The rail also was repaired, although Tony's professional opinion of the way that job had been done was not startlingly complimentary.

"It looks like a piece of George's work," he said. "Now, 'fess up, who did it?"

"We 're both guilty," explained Jack.

"Well, it 's a pretty difficult thing to do unless you 're a regular ship's carpenter," admitted Tony. "It 'll pass, for the present, but some day soon, when I have time, I 'll fix it properly for you."

The boys cut the belaying-pins out of oak, and then little remained for them to do until the expert services of Tony had been called in. The most important part of his share was to place in her again the sloop's old discarded mast, a good, serviceable spar which towered to a height of thirty-five feet.

"It 's as high as anything you could want,"

said Tony. "That mast did service in her for two years, till Mr. Farnham got the notion into his head that he wanted a bigger spread of canvas on her. Lucky for you lads this mast was n't five or ten feet longer, or I should have used it in another boat long ago."

"What about a mains'l and a jib, Dad?" suggested George. "You 've got plenty of junk lying around in the shed. May we use what we need?"

"I 've been thinking about that, son," replied Tony. "I could have fixed you up, perhaps, with some rags of sails that are n't any particular good, but I don't know that I 'm specially anxious to have you two blowing about outside the breakwater, depending on rags. You might be all right with them, but it is n't wise to take any chances in a sailing-vessel. Now, I have a couple of sails that would just about fit this sloop after a mite of alteration. They 're not new, and they 're not junk. I could get about fifteen dollars for them this summer, but if you 'd like to take them and pay

me after you 've earned the money with your ferry, you can have them for ten. What do you say?''

''Why, that 's great!'' said Jack. ''Thank you ever so much.''

''All right. Call it a deal. Now, there 's a block or two you 'll have to scare up, and halyards and mast-hoops. You can't go half an inch away from shore on a sailing-trip without all these things. Mast-hoops you need n't worry about. There are plenty of old ones kicking about here. On a pinch I might even rake out a couple of blocks. They may n't be just the size you ought to have for elegance, but you 'll get by with them. I don't see how you can manage without buying halyards, though. You 'll want—oh, about four hundred feet or so of fifteen-thread manila. I can't afford to give you good manila rope. It costs money.''

''I have three dollars left,'' put in Jack.

''Well, well, you won't get enough new manila to fit your little ship out with that, but I dare say I can find enough second-hand hal-

yards for three dollars to give you a start. If you 'll give me a hand I 'll have a peek at those sails now.''

The jib which Tony produced fitted the *Sea-Lark* perfectly, but the mainsail had three sets of reef-points, and it needed to be cut away at the single reef. This operation took the whole of a Saturday to accomplish, for there was a considerable amount of sewing to do, and neither Jack nor his companion proved to be quick with the cumbersome sailmaker's needle. Meanwhile, however, the mast had been stepped, and at last the sloop was really beginning to look like her old self. Halyards were rove, blocks put into position, a new wire jib-stay rigged from the top of the mast to the end of the bowsprit, and a bobstay had to be furnished. Then a coat of paint was spread over the deck and the rest of the woodwork. When the last detail in the refitting of the *Sea-Lark* had been attended to and the paint was dry, Tony Santo, after a final survey which could hardly have been more thorough had the sloop been a government war-ship about to depart on her speed

trials, declared that she was as sound as a bell and fit to weather a young hurricane.

It was, without question, the proudest moment in Jack's life when the boat was gently pushed off the sandy bank of Cow Creek. Jack's father was there to see it, having left his bookkeeping for the occasion.

"I 'd like to go with you on your first trip, lad," he said, "but I 'm afraid I can't spare the time."

Sailing was an old accomplishment for both the captain and his young mate, but most of their experience in that direction had been gained in dories, which compared with taking the *Sea-Lark* out on a trip was child's play. The *Sea-Lark* was not, however, too large for two to handle. Other sloops even larger were wont to flit about the waters of Greenport harbor in the summer with only two persons aboard, and there was one, fifty feet over all, which one man usually handled alone. She, however, was a "freak" ship, and her owner had to dance around like a pea in a hot frying-pan when an emergency arose.

Tony Santo accompanied the boys on their experimental trip, partly because there was a long, winding journey for the sloop to make down Cow Creek, through the upper reach of the Sangus River, and finally through the canal. Partly, also, Tony went to make sure that they were all right. And partly he went for the fun of the thing, because Tony was only twenty years older than his son, and there was enough of the boy left in him to appreciate some of the thrill which was stirred in the lads by this their greatest adventure.

A westerly breeze was blowing, which necessitated the sloop being towed until she came to within about four miles of the sea, and then a clear run lay before them. Their dory trailed behind and Tony took the spokes of the sloop's wheel in his hands.

"Now, lads," he said. "Let 's shake out a bit of canvas. Mains'l first. Don't get excited. Take it easy. There 's plenty of time. Both together. Heave! That 's the style. It was n't so hard, after all, was it? Either one of you will be able to do that by himself if neces-

sary. And it may be necessary too, some day. Belay there. Make those halyards good and secure. Now, up with the jib. Be smart, or we 'll run her aground yet. Trim aft the jib-sheet. That 's fine. Belay!"

The breeze filled the sails, and the sloop leaned over slightly as she gathered way. Jack's eyes were dancing with pleasure. The *Sea-Lark* was not only an accomplished fact and afloat, but actually sailing. And he was her master!

"Is n't she a beauty!" he asked Tony.

"Pretty fair, pretty fair, I 'll admit that," replied the boat-builder. "You 're a lucky lad to have her, but you 've earned her. I dare say Mr. Farnham would have given the sloop to any one else if they had thought of writing to him; only it was you who happened to think of it, and it 's the people who think of things who get on in this world. Now, this good-for-nothing son of mine," and he took George affectionately by the ear, "never thinks of anything except to get up in the morning and go back to bed at night; do you, son? Come along,

Jack. I know you 're aching to get to this wheel. I guess it 's quite safe for you to take her now."

The owner of the *Sea-Lark* exchanged places with Tony, and the sloop ran slowly toward the ocean under his guiding hand. The breeze was light and steady, and she barely made three knots an hour, but at that moment Jack would not have exchanged places with the captain of the finest liner afloat. The gentle swish of water at the stern was as sweetest music to his ears. The occasional lazy flap of the sails, the barely perceptible swaying of the deck, the quick turn of the prow in response to the slightest movement of the spokes in his hands, all were delights which he was now tasting for the first time in his own boat.

"Well," said Tony, who had been watching the expression on the captain's face, "what do you think of her? Was she worth the trouble?"

"A thousand times!" Jack replied, devoutly.

After negotiating the short canal the sloop passed into the sea, and then, running south

past Gull Island, headed for the end of the breakwater and the open ocean beyond.

A mile off shore the breeze freshened sufficiently to send the *Sea-Lark* bowling along at a fair caper. The swish of water at the stern became more pronounced. The halyards creaked a little, and the bow responded even more readily to a movement of the wheel. The *Sea-Lark* had come into her own again. She seemed like a living thing. There was joyousness in the way she danced, as, going further from shore, she ran into gentle undulating swells, which kissed her as if welcoming her back to her natural element.

"Let 's see you put her through a few manœuvers," Tony suggested. "Haul her by the wind. I 'm going to keep still and watch."

"Close haul your mains'l, Mr. Mate," ordered Jack.

George sprang to obey, and in came the boom, whereupon Jack headed away to the southwest.

"That 's right," declared Tony. "You can come closer to the wind yet. Come round till the luff of the mains'l begins to lift. That 's

the style. Now put your helm down and go onto the other tack."

"Mind your head, George!" sang out the captain.

"Aye, aye," responded the mate; and the *Sea-Lark's* nose went straight up into the wind. The boom swung across the deck, mains'l and jib flapping in the breeze.

"Stick to it. You 're all right," cried Tony, pleased with the skill his apprentices were displaying. "She 'll make it if you give her time."

Farther the sloop came as the wind got to the other side of her sails. Quickly she swung about, and then headed straight as an arrow, on the port tack.

"Now, listen here, boys," said Tony. "The time may come when you 'll be compelled to jibe her in an emergency, to avoid a collision. But I want you to promise that you 'll never do so unless you 're compelled to, because though it 's all right to do it now, with no wind to speak of, and me aboard to see that nothing happens, jibing is no sort of game for two boys

to play at in a sloop of this size. While I 'm here, though, I 'd like to see you make a shot at it. When you 're ready, Cap'n."

Jack, who was on the port tack, having got there from the starboard tack by the simple and usual course of heading into the wind and allowing the boat to swing over, now wanted to run before the wind and while doing so alter his course so that the boom swung over from the starboard to the port side.

He glanced along the surface of the water to the westward, to see there was no strong puff of wind coming.

Taking advantage of a temporary lull in the breeze, the sloop swung round harmlessly.

"Ease off your main sheet!" the skipper ordered. Away ran the boom as a fresh puff filled the sail; and the *Sea-Lark* was already winging its way before the wind.

"That 's all right," Tony approved. "You 've got the hang of it. But remember what I say; that 's a dangerous manœuver if there 's much of a breeze."

For another hour or two the boat-builder

continued to coach the boys in the art of sailing; and then, as they ran toward the town, he declared that they were not likely to come to much harm if they promised never to go outside the breakwater until he was able to "certify" them as sufficiently skilled, never to make the sheet fast with anything but a hitch which could quickly be cast off in case of a sudden squall sweeping down, and never to sail without a reef taken in when the whitecaps were making.

The sloop was moored at Garnett and Sayer's wharf, under the guarding gaze of Cap'n Crumbie, who had promised Jack he would keep an eye on her.

"I was watching you," said that worthy a little later to Jack. "You seem to handle her all right. But mind you, it 's one thing to sail a sloop on a day like this, and a song with a different tune when there 's rough weather."

Another five days remained before the summer vacation began, and Jack spent the afternoons making himself more proficient in the art of handling his new craft. After coming

ashore on the last evening, he and his mate spent an hour or two engaged in some mysterious occupation at the Santo boat-house. They requisitioned a saw, a hammer, tacks, part of an old sheet, a five-cent paint-brush, and some paint. Then they were quiet for a while, working away by the aid of a lantern.

After a while Tony saw them and approached.

"Don't come here yet, Dad," urged George.

"What are you two young conspirators up to now?" asked the boat-builder.

"We 're artists, Dad," replied George, chuckling. And then they were quiet again.

"There," said Jack at length. "How 's that?"

"It 'll fetch them, all right," commented the mate of the *Sea-Lark,* with complete satisfaction.

It was a perfect summer morning when Holden's Ferry came into being. The lightest of breezes came in from the south, leaving a bare ripple on the placid water of Greenport harbor. The townsfolk were only just beginning to be astir when two figures emerged from the

Santo boat-yard bearing something which might have been a picture, judging by its shape and size. One or two persons stared curiously as they passed, while Cap'n Crumbie—who, though now officially off duty with the coming of day, was on the wharf as usual—greeted the boys with a puzzled look.

"What have you got there?" he asked suspiciously.

Jack turned his "picture" so that it faced the watchman, who raised his eyebrows and took his pipe out of his mouth while he allowed his gaze to rest on the object. Then he threw back his head and gave vent to a hearty laugh.

"You 'll do, the pair o' you!" he said. "Enterprise, that 's what I call it. Where are you going to put it?"

"On the top of the deck-house," replied Jack, suiting the action to the word, and then climbing back upon the wharf to admire the effect.

CHAPTER V

A RESCUE

THE notice was printed with a brush on a piece of sheeting, in a frame a yard long and a half a yard high:

HOLDEN'S FERRY
TO THE HOTEL LANDING
EVERY HOUR
10 cents

"People can see it, anyway," commented George.

"And I saw it first, so I 'll be the first passenger," said Cap'n Crumbie. "When does the ferry leave?"

"Right away," replied Jack. "The moment you step aboard I 'll see if I can knock a bit of life into my crew. Look at him! *Look* at him, sitting there on the top of the deck-house laughing, and the ship crammed with a whole

passenger waiting to get across to the Point on most important business! Watch your step, Cap'n. Dining-saloon forward, but the cook 's not on duty to-day, so we can't serve meals. Mr. Mate, let go that rope for'ard and don't fall overboard in front of all the passenger. Run that mains'l up and be lively about it or, shiver my timbers, I 'll know the reason why! Now, Cap'n Crumbie, if you 're at all likely to be seasick, you 'd better slip down into the cabin and take a nap. If there 's any danger, I 'll call you."

"Starboard your helm a bit," said Cap'n Crumbie. "The only danger I see is that you 're like to bump into that coal-barge if you don't keep her away." He put out a brawny hand and with a slight pull on the wheel brought the sloop further away from the collision that had threatened as the sloop started away from the wharf, not yet fully under control.

"Paint is scarce," said Jack. "I don't want to lose any."

"Not with bumping into one o' Simon Barker's boats, you don't," agreed Cap'n Crumbie.

"Not that he 'd ever think o' putting paint on the side o' one of his ships if tar would do, but I want to warn you right now that he 's none too friendly. He has n't got over that little affair with your father yet, though I don't see what *he 's* got to kick about. He was down on our wharf yesterday, trying his best to be ugly about this little sloop. Said she got in the way o' his craft, he did. He 's a misery. Don't you ever leave the *Sea-Lark* lying in the way o' his rotten old boats, or she 'll get crushed for a certainty, if he has anything to do with it. And he 'll sure make out that it was all your fault."

"Thank you for being a passenger," said Jack, as the vessel edged up to the hotel landing on the Point. "If you 're not going to stay ashore long I will wait for you."

"Ashore! I ain't going ashore," replied the watchman. "I just came across to be able to tell my great-grandchildren, when you 're an old man, that I was the first to cross the harbor in Holden's Ferry. Here 's my twenty cents. Now take me back."

"I can't take the money. We sailors always give free passage to old shipmates," said Jack. "Why, we should never have had her painted if it had n't been for you, Cap'n! Besides, you 're one of the crew, in a way. Did n't you say you were going to keep an eye on her? Yes, you 're our watchman. Could n't dream of taking the money."

"Son, I hired this ship for the trip," replied Cap'n Crumbie, "and when you two have gone and drowned yourselves some fine day I don't want it on my conscience that there 's twenty cents I owe you. When you 've been at sea as long as I have you won't so much mind letting people pay their fare."

"All right, Cap'n," Jack responded. "George, half of this goes to you, for luck. Push her off there. Wait a second. Here comes a passenger, I believe."

Walking down to the landing was a tall boy, about Jack's age.

"Ahoy, there! Going across in the ferry?" Cap'n Crumbie hailed.

The prospective passenger did not reply, but

came straight to the landing, and, with a puzzled expression, ran his eyes over the *Sea-Lark*.

"What have you got there?" he asked. There was something about either the question or the way in which it was put that rather irritated the captain of the sloop. However, he did not openly show his resentment.

"A ferry-boat, across to the town," he replied. "Are you coming?"

"Queer sort of boat to use for a ferry, is n't she?" asked the stranger.

"Why?" asked Jack, who saw nothing whatever queer about his beloved craft. Obviously the strange boy was one of the "summer folk," and city bred at that, probably knowing no more about sailing-craft than the keeper of a dime museum would.

The boy on the wharf began to laugh, and Jack's cheeks flushed.

"Are you the chap who wrote to Mr. Farnham in New York about the *Sea-Lark?*" the stranger asked.

"That," replied the skipper with youthful dignity, "is my business. Push off, George."

"And who might the young pup be?" asked Cap'n Crumbie, as they sailed leisurely back to Garnett and Sayer's wharf. "Never seen him before, as far as I rec'lect, and yet his face is kind o' familiar."

"I don't know him," said Jack. "And if he 's trying to be funny at the expense of this boat, I don't want to know him. There 's nothing queer about her, is there, Cap'n?"

"Queer! I should say not! Maybe the color o' the paint offends his artistic eye; or then again maybe he 's only jealous."

"Well, summer visitor or not, if he does n't stop trying to make fun of the sloop I 'll give him a licking," declared Jack.

"Or let him come on board as a passenger," grinned the watchman, "and take his money, and then drop him overboard half-way over."

That morning only two other passengers crossed in the ferry, one of them a lady who had a small hand-bag with her and insisted on paying Jack fifty cents for his services, and the other a portly man who wore three diamond

rings and, after handing Jack a quarter at the hotel landing, waiting in the boat, apparently as a guarantee of good faith, while the boy hunted for change, and finished up by pocketing the fifteen cents and complaining bitterly about the lad running a public ferry and not being able to change a quarter.

Business did not improve much during the rest of the day, and the owner of the ferry was a trifle disappointed.

"They don't seem to be coming with a rush," he said to Cap'n Crumbie.

"For the land's sake, give 'em a chance!" replied the watchman. "Here you are, not in business more than an hour or two, and complaining."

"I was n't complaining," Jack protested. "I was only wondering whether it was going to be a success, after all."

"Can't you wait about five minutes till somebody besides us gets wind o' the ferry?" spluttered the old man. "Give 'em time, son, give 'em time. Why, the season has n't half begun

yet. Most of the cottages along the shore are still empty. Another week or two will make a difference; you see if it don't."

Sure enough, business did "look up" a few days later, much to the satisfaction of both Jack and his father. Mr. Holden, though he had never discouraged the boy in his project, had always been a little skeptical as to whether the ferry would bring much grist to the mill, but he now grew really enthusiastic, for there were times when the *Sea-Lark* carried as many as fifteen people at a time. To some extent Cap'n Crumbie was responsible for the boy's success in the early stages of the ferry's career, as he rarely allowed a party of sight-seers to wander down to his wharf without urging them to make the trip in the *Sea-Lark*.

"Wunnerful sight over there on the Point," he would say. "You get a view from there that ain't equaled in all New England. Ferry-boat won't be more 'n a few minutes, sir, before it 's back, and it 's a fine day for a sail."

"I shall have to give you a commission," de-

clared Jack, once, after the watchman had detained almost a boat-load of people until his return.

"Now, don't talk foolish," replied Cap'n Crumbie. "It 's just to keep me from gettin' tired o' myself. Some night maybe I 'll borrow the sloop and take a party for a moonlight trip round Indian Head. Meanwhile, I can't stand here and see you losing good money."

"That 's a bargain, Cap'n Crumbie," replied Jack. "Any evening you want the *Sea-Lark* you just mention it."

That afternoon Jack left the hotel landing with several passengers, including the lady who had given him fifty cents on the first day. She was going into the town shopping, but Jack noticed that she stood for a moment on the wharf before embarking, and wore a rather anxious expression as she looked out toward a canoe that was being paddled about in the vicinity of Gull Island.

"Don't you think the wind is a little too strong for any one to be out there in a canoe?" she asked.

The skipper glanced at the little craft bobbing up and down in the distance.

"Well, it depends on how well you can handle a canoe," he replied. "There 's a fresh breeze, though, and it 's kind of choppy."

Jack had been thinking of taking a reef in his mainsail, but a few moments later he was glad he had n't. He had run about a cable's length from the landing, and the passengers were watching a salt-bark slowly drifting to anchorage, when his eyes happened to alight on the canoe. It was perhaps half a mile away, and Jack's thoughts were on the navigation of his own boat, but the brief glance showed him something amiss. With a shout to George to haul in the sheet, he put the helm hard over and jibed the *Sea-Lark,* rather than make the turn in a safer but slower way. There was a stiff wind blowing, and the boom swept across the deck with a rattle and a bang, fetching up on the other side with a wrench. But the gear stood the strain, and the sloop was now racing in the direction of the canoe, which had capsized.

There was a sudden cry of alarm from the

lady. "He 's drowning! He 's drowning!" Every vestige of color was gone from her face, as, leaning forward, she stared in horror across the water. "It 's Rodney! It 's my boy!"

"Lay hold of that boat-hook, George," sang out the captain. And then, "We 'll get him in time, ma'am," he added reassuringly to the distracted mother.

The *Sea-Lark* leaned to the breeze and flew on her mission of rescue. That she would arrive none too soon was evident to all on board. Apparently the boy in the water was no swimmer, and his floundering efforts were barely keeping his head above the surface. A choking appeal for help came across the rapidly narrowing water that intervened.

"Take the wheel, George!" Jack spoke crisply, imperatively. "Keep her straight!" As he spoke he slipped off jacket and shoes. "The moment I jump swing her 'round. You, sir," he added, to one of the passengers, "be ready to reach out to me with this boat-hook."

Another twenty feet! Ten! And then the boy in the water, with a despairing cry, sank

from sight. Jack, poised at the bow, shot over the side as the *Sea-Lark* sped past.

Down he went into the green depths. A few yards away a blurred shape showed dimly and he swam gropingly toward it. Then his hands found what they sought and in a moment his head was above water again. Kicking out with all his strength, and sweeping his right hand through the green water, he clung on to the half-drowned canoeist with his left, until the sloop, with fluttering sail, loomed beside him.

A minute later the two dripping figures were on the deck.

The canoeist opened his eyes and looked up at the woman who was now kneeling beside him. He tried to raise himself on his elbow, but sank back, gasping for a few moments.

"Hello, Mother! I—I 'm all right," he said presently. "Just a minute, till I get my breath back. Hope I have n't scared you, but I—I was n't going to drown."

Then he sat up, somewhat limply, and looked around. The captain, with water running from

his clothing, was assisting George to recover the canoe and paddle. As soon as this had been accomplished, he turned his attention to the boy he had rescued, and for the first time recognized him.

"Well, how do you feel?" Jack asked, bearing no ill feeling.

"Pretty fair, thanks," replied the other. "I think I 'm still full up to the neck with water, though. I 'm awfully obliged to you. I tried to catch hold of the paddle, but I could n't quite make it. Then I saw your boat coming, but it seemed ever so far away. I 'd have been—" he was going to say "drowned by now," but checked himself as his mother was there—"down there yet if you had n't come to the rescue."

"That 's all right," Jack replied. "Glad to have been able to help." Then, as the canoeist seemed to have almost recovered, he added: "Only—only, just as a favor, don't laugh at this boat again, please!"

A puzzled look came into the other's face.

"Laugh at her?" he queried.

"Yes," replied Jack, "and you said she was a queer sort of boat to use for a ferry."

"Oh, I remember now," said the owner of the canoe. "But don't you know why it seemed queer to me?" Jack shook his head. "Why, you see, this was my father's sloop, for a long time, and all I meant was that it seemed queer to me to see her being used as a ferry-boat. I used to sail about in her with my dad three years ago, and many a time I held that wheel you 're steering with. I used to feel that she was my boat, though of course, really, she was nothing of the kind. My name is Rodney Farnham, and this is my mother."

Jack felt a little sheepish because of the resentment he had shown, and after Rodney Farnham's frank explanation he began to reconsider his opinion of the lad.

"I did n't understand," he said. "Sorry if I was rude. I have n't seen Mr. Farnham yet, but I want to, to tell him how glad I am he gave me the boat. I wrote to tell him I 'd got her afloat, but he did n't reply."

"Dad 's a pretty busy man when he 's in New York, and I guess he has n't had too much time to write. You may be sure he meant to look you up when he came down to Greenport, though," replied Rod. "We have a motor-boat now, and you must come for a run in her with me some day; but I 'm jolly glad he gave you the old *Sea-Lark,* or I might still be floating around back there."

"It was very fortunate," Mrs. Farnham agreed. "My husband will be doubly anxious to see you now. I shall write to him to-night, telling him what happened. He will probably be with us next week."

"When he comes I 'd like to take you all for a sail. That is, if you would care to go. You 'd be quite safe," said Jack.

"I 'm sure we should, judging from what I 've seen of your seamanship to-day," replied Mrs. Farnham. "And it is very kind of you to ask us. I 'm sure we would all love to go with you."

When the sloop touched Garnett and Sayer's

wharf Mrs. Farnham, on assuring herself that Rodney was no worse after his immersion, stepped ashore.

"I did n't like to say so in front of Mother," remarked Rod, as soon as the sloop was heading back toward the Point, "but that was the narrowest escape I 've ever had in my life. I 'd got to the stage where I did n't know much. By the way, I hope you 're doing good business with the sloop."

"Not bad," replied the captain. "It was fairly slow at first, but the town is pretty full of visitors now, and all the cottages on the Point are open."

"It must have cost you a lot to get her fixed up like this," Rod said, giving the vessel a comprehensive glance.

Jack smiled, and shook his head.

"It might have, if we had n't done the work ourselves," he replied. "George Santo, here, helped me a lot, and we did the whole thing ourselves, except fixing the mast and rigging, of course."

"But you 've had her painted," said Rod.

"We did that, too," replied the skipper. "It cost us just fifty cents, but we got the paint at a special bargain. The sails and halyards were all I really had to buy, and I made almost enough at the ferry in the first week to pay for those."

"Well, she looks splendid," said Rod, stepping off at the hotel landing. "And—and, I 'm awfully glad Dad gave her to you!"

CHAPTER VI

PROWLERS

SOMETIMES Jack had to be not only skipper but mate also of the good ship *Sea-Lark,* when his "crew" was otherwise engaged. Now and then Tony Santo needed his son's assistance in the boat-yard. On one such occasion—it was the day following the rescue of Rodney Farnham—a man entered the shed and addressed the boat-builder.

"Do you rent boats here?" he asked.

"I can let you have a dory if you want to go down the creek," replied Tony.

The man shook his head impatiently.

"Something larger than that," he answered. "A sailing-boat, for instance."

"You can't do much sailing on the creek," said the boat-builder. "Why don't you inquire along the wharves?"

"Why, I was wondering," was the hesitating reply, "whether you happened to have a little sloop—something I could handle by myself."

George observed the man curiously. He did not look like a person who would go in for sailing, and, by the same token, he was not particularly prepossessing. He was a little above the average height, and his clothes, though new, did not fit him well. His manner seemed nervous, and he fidgeted with one of the buttons on his coat while talking.

"Nothing just now," replied Tony.

"Do you remember a little sloop called the *Sea-Lark?*" asked the stranger.

George and his father exchanged glances.

"Why, yes," replied Tony. "Belonged to Mr. Farnham?"

"That 's right," said the man. "What ever became of her? If I could get her she 'd be just the sort I want."

"I don't think money would hire her," put in George.

"Well, you see," explained Tony, "these boys have her. She ran ashore in the Sangus three

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years ago and they got her afloat a while ago and fixed her up."

"What?" exclaimed the stranger, sharply. "Where is she now?"

"She 's being used as a ferry-boat, across the harbor."

"Who owns her?" was the next query.

"Jack Holden. You 'll find him down on Garnett and Sayer's wharf with her 'most any time."

"Jack Holden, eh? If he won't hire her he might be willing to sell her, maybe."

"It is n't very likely, but you can go and ask him. I guess you 'll find him down there now."

"Thanks," said the man laconically, and presently went off.

But the stranger, though he went to the ferry, was in no apparent hurry to tackle Jack on the question of hiring or buying the sloop. He stood chatting with Cap'n Crumbie on the wharf until the *Sea-Lark* returned, and then crossed to the Point and strolled off.

"That 's a rum-looking bird you took across

just now," commented Cap'n Crumbie, as soon as Jack landed back.

"I did n't notice him specially," replied Jack. "At least, not at first. He did n't seem to be able to keep still for more than a minute. I noticed his hands, though, when he gave me his fare. He must have been doing some pretty hard work for a long time, and yet he was n't dressed quite like a workman."

Cap'n Crumbie grunted. He prided himself on being able to distinguish a day tripper or a drummer from a regular visitor on sight, and an artist from both.

"I could n't place him. He don't belong here, anyway," replied the watchman.

"He was cross-eyed or something, was n't he?" Jack asked.

Cap'n Crumbie shook his head.

"No," he replied slowly. "I know what you mean, though. It 's his eyes that are set too close together. Don't you never lend a quarter to a feller whose eyes come as near each other as that, Jack, 'cause it 's all New England to a

piece o' cheese that you 'll be twenty-five cents short from that moment on. My guess is that if yon feller is n't a crook o' some sort, he 's a mighty good imitation."

The subject of the stranger was then dropped, but an hour later Jack took especial notice of the man when he came on board the ferry again at the Point, to return to town.

"Nice little boat you 've got here," the man observed.

"I like her very well," replied Jack.

"She would just about suit me. I 've been looking for a craft of this sort. Would you like to rent her?"

"By the hour, do you mean?" Jack asked.

"Something like that. I only want to potter around."

"I can't do that very well," said the captain. "I'm fairly busy in the day time with the ferry. I could take you out some evening, though."

"Oh, I can manage her by myself," replied the man. "You need n't bother to come."

"I would n't let her go out unless I was in her. I would n't trust her to any one."

"Huh! Well, what about selling her?"

"Not this season," said Jack. "I have only just started this ferry and it looks as though I might clean up something by the fall."

"Best let me hire her," said the man. "My name is Martin, and I expect to be around Greenport for a while. Look here, you need n't be afraid of me doing any damage to her. I 'll promise not to take her outside the breakwater, and of course if there *should* be any damage I 'll make it good."

Jack wavered for an instant, but only an instant. The sloop was by far the most treasured possession he had ever had, and the idea of allowing some one else to run her about, perhaps scraping her botton against the rocks, or even capsizing her, was distinctly distasteful. Moreover, had not Cap'n Crumbie warned him only a little while previously of placing much faith in such a man? As a matter of fact, if something did happen to the *Sea-Lark* and this man gave him another boat in her place, it would not be the same. He loved the *Sea-Lark* for what she was, for what she had already done for him,

and because of the long hours of toil he had spent in making her into what she was.

"No, thanks," he said. "Any time you want to go for a sail in the evening, after the ferry stops running at six o'clock, I 'll take you, but I won't let her go otherwise."

Martin shrugged, and strolled forward for a while, after which he went below into the little cabin, where there were one or two passengers sitting. As the sloop neared the wharf he came on deck again.

"Now, don't forget what I 've said," he remarked. "Any time you change your mind, let me know, see?"

"I 'm not likely to, thanks," replied Jack, surprised at the man's persistence.

Jack and the watchman were standing together on the wharf a few minutes afterward, when George Santo joined them.

"Well, did you sell the *Sea-Lark,* Jack?" he inquired.

"Sell her? Who to?" replied the skipper.

"A man was inquiring about her," said the mate. "He asked us all sorts of questions at

the boat-yard, and then said he was coming down here to make a dicker with you."

"How funny!" observed the captain of the *Sea-Lark*. "He must be crazy about her. I 'm not surprised, but I wonder why, all the same. You did n't tell him I wanted to sell her?"

"I told him money would n't buy her from you."

"Well, that 's pretty nearly true. I don't like the chap. Nor does the Cap'n, here. He worries me. George Santo, you 're fired! Where have you been all this day? Here I 've been steward, and ship's carpenter, and cook, and deck-hand, and cabin-boy ever since eight o'clock this morning. I wanted to see you on a little matter of business."

"If I 'm fired, you can't have any business with me; can he, Cap'n Crumbie?"

"Come hither!" said Jack, catching hold of George's ear and leading him upon the sloop. "Step into the office. Not into the sea, idiot! Quick march, into the cabin! Now, sit down. See," he added, producing a small note-book

from his pocket; "I have been working out some figures. We 're making money, son—not millions, exactly, but we 're doing better than I ever expected. I want to have a settling up with you. I asked Cap'n Crumbie what would be fair, and he said you ought to have a third of the takings. The boat takes a share, and as she 's mine, that goes to me, of course. The other third I take."

"But I don't want to take a share," George protested. "I 've done nothing, except play around a bit."

"I don't care whether you want to or not; you 're going to if I have to give it to your father for you. Think of your starving wife and children that you were talking about when I signed you on."

The captain fetched out a bundle of bills and a handful of loose silver, laid them on the table, and divided the money into three piles. One he pushed over to his mate and the rest he stowed into his own pocket.

"What 'll I do with all this?" asked George.

"How do I know? Found a college or some-

thing. Anyway, drop it into your pocket now. By the way, don't forget to report on Sunday, in your best uniform, the one with the gold braid on it that I didn't buy you. The Farnhams are coming out for a sail, and I 'll need your help, Mr. Mate."

The sloop was tied up each night at Garnett and Sayer's wharf, where Cap'n Crumbie could see her during his nightly peregrinations. Not that Jack was afraid of her being stolen, for such a thing was unlikely, but there was always the possibility of the youthful element of Greenport scrambling over her and doing damage.

On the morning following Rodney Farnham's rescue, however, the watchman reported something to the captain of the *Sea-Lark* which aroused vague misgivings in him.

"What time did you go to bed last night?" asked the Cap'n, eyeing Jack suspiciously.

"About ten o'clock. Why?"

"Umph!" snorted the watchman. "I thought maybe it was you prowling around, having some sort of a joke; and yet I knew it was too late for you to be up to any pranks."

"Not a prank!" replied Jack. "I was tired and went straight to sleep. You went to bed early too, did n't you, George?"

The mate nodded, and the watchman pushed his cap back and rubbed his head in a perplexed fashion.

"Blest if I know, exactly," he said. "The sloop 's all right. I went on board and examined her again this morning, and not a thing had been touched."

"Examined her *again!* But what happened in the night?" Jack was now becoming concerned, in spite of the fact that the sloop lay basking in the bright sunshine at his feet.

" 'T was about midnight, as near as I can remember," said the Cap'n. "I 'd been having a little doze in my cubby, and I walked out here to take a squint 'round. I 'd no idea anything was wrong, mind you. It was mighty dark, 'cause the moon had n't got up yet, and it was cloudy. I was standing right here, lighting my pipe, when I heard something down yonder at the far side of the *Sea-Lark.* It was n't much of a noise, more like the soft bumping of a dory

up against her side than anything. P'r'aps I would n't have taken any special notice of it, only there was no wind, and as far as I could remember nobody had left any dory near."

" 'Hello, there!' I calls out, not thinking anything special about it. If I 'd known then what I knew a minute later I 'd ha' been down aboard the sloop afore you could ha' said your own name. But I did n't.

"There was somebody there, right on the deck of your ferry-boat, but he did n't say a word. I heard the bumping sound again, as though he 'd drawn a dory to the side with a jerk, and he jumped into it. Then he rowed off quick as lightning. I hollered after him, but he took no notice, so I got my lantern and went aboard the sloop. The cabin door was locked, just as you always leave it. Come to think of it, there 's nothing special any one could steal. Anyway, that 's all that happened, but you may be sure I did n't take no more dozes till daybreak."

"How queer!" commented Jack, uneasily.

"Rowed clean away, he did. Mind you, it might ha' been some one who 'd landed there

while I was dozing, and he was just putting off again, but why did he land against the side o' the *Sea-Lark* when he could pretty near have walked onto the wharf ten yards further on?''

''And what was he doing there, anyway, at midnight?'' asked Jack. ''You don't get people prowling around the wharf very often at that time of night, do you?''

''If I catch 'em at it you may be sure I want to know what they 're after,'' replied the watchman. ''The queer thing about it was his sliding off without saying a word when I hailed him.''

''I don't like it,'' said Jack. ''There may have been nothing wrong, of course, but, well, you see, I should feel sick if anything happened to that boat.''

''I wonder who it could have been,'' said George.

''Cap'n Crumbie, I have half a mind to spend to-night on board,'' said Jack. ''I could sleep in one of the bunks in the cabin just as well as in bed at home.''

The watchman took his pipe out of his mouth

and carefully laid it down. When he did that you knew he was thinking hard.

"There 's no *need* to do that, son," he replied, "so long as I 'm here. You may depend on it I 'm going to keep my eyes skinned for the next week or so, till we get the moon again. But then again, there would n't be any harm done if you do want to sleep aboard."

"Yes, Jack, let 's," pleaded the mate. "I don't think I 've ever slept on a boat."

"All right," agreed the skipper. "If we both get murdered don't blame me. Bring a blanket down after supper, George, and we 'll make ourselves comfortable."

Cap'n Crumbie lent the boys a lantern, and after wishing them a cheery "good night," left them alone. For about an hour they chatted, and then, feeling sleepy, turned out the light and rolled themselves up in their blankets. George dropped off to sleep within a few minutes, but Jack turned about in his bunk for some time before following suit. He did not expect his slumbers to be disturbed, for, the more he thought about it the more he came to the con-

clusion that the visitor to the sloop the previous night must have come to the wharf for something which had nothing to do with the *Sea-Lark*. There was so little on board that could be stolen. Nobody in his senses would do such a clumsy thing as attempt to get away with the old sails, he mused.

It was pitch-black in the cabin. Up on deck it was not much better, for the thin crescent of a moon was not due for hours yet, and there were clouds in the sky again to-night. Occasionally the sloop rocked gently as the water lapped her side and burbled between her and the wharf. It was a soft, soothing sound. Jack was perfectly comfortable, and very happy. It was a good idea to sleep on the boat, he reflected. The novelty of the thing appealed to him greatly. Later, when the weather grew hot, he and George would often do it. He wondered vaguely what Cap'n Crumbie was doing on the wharf. Perhaps snatching forty winks in his own little snuggery. Jack felt he could n't blame the Cap'n if he did snatch forty winks—fifty, if he liked—

And then he dropped suddenly into healthy slumber.

How long he slept he had not the remotest idea, but he awoke with a start. Something had happened, but he did not quite realize what. That he *had* been awakened by something he was perfectly sure. Almost holding his breath, and listening intently for the slightest sound, he lay perfectly still, his eyes open, but seeing nothing in the darkness.

After perhaps twenty seconds Jack raised himself cautiously to his elbow, still straining his ears. Then there came again the thing which had awakened him.

The sloop swayed, as though something were being pressed heavily upon her side.

Silently as a shadow, Jack slipped from his bunk, and extended a hand to awaken his chum. But on second thought he changed his mind. George would be sure to say something if he were awakened, and that would scare the midnight prowler off instantly.

Jack was standing in the middle of the cabin, feeling for a stout stick which he had placed at

hand before going to sleep. Then there came a slight creaking sound from the handle of the companionway door.

Some one outside was turning it.

CHAPTER VII

THE CLUE

JACK'S hand closed tightly on the stick and he raised it, ready to strike.

The door hinges creaked. Jack's pulse was thumping as he had never known it to do. There was, of course, the bare possibility that this might be the watchman paying them a visit to see that all was well, and Jack had no desire to lay the worthy Cap'n Crumbie out on the cabin floor with a cracked skull.

"Who 's there?" he asked in a voice which he hardly recognized as his own. The boy could not even make out the outline of the intruder in the blackness.

There was a moment of tense silence, but only a moment. As soon as the midnight visitor recovered from the shock of finding some one in the cabin he closed the door with a bang just as

Jack brought down his stick sharply, but it only came in contact with the wooden panel.

George leaped out of his bunk in alarm.

"What 's wrong?" he shouted.

Jack, however, had no time to waste on explanations. He seized the handle and flung open the door, just in time to hear the soft patter of bare feet along the deck, and the deep bass of Cap'n Crumbie, up on the wharf, whom the noise had attracted.

"Hello, Jack! Are you there? What 's up?" he called down anxiously.

Jack was by now half-way across the deck, following the retreating figure, but the mysterious visitor leaped over the side into a boat and pushed away before the boy could get within reach.

"Somebody came into the cabin," Jack shouted back to the watchman. "Slip on board, and we 'll go after him on the sloop."

"You can't, son," replied Cap'n Crumbie. "There ain't enough wind. Listen! Which way did he go?"

The watchman and the two boys strained

their ears, but the fugitive, after pulling a few strokes, had evidently dipped his oars in the water gently. Not a sound was to be heard, save the swish of the tide against the wharf piles and the side of the sloop.

"Well, if that don't beat the Dutch!" exclaimed Cap'n Crumbie. "You did n't *see* him, o' course?"

"No," replied Jack. "I was asleep, and we had no light. If I 'd been half a second quicker I might have winged him with this stick, but I could n't be sure it was n't you. He slammed the door in my face and bolted as soon as I spoke."

"I heard you call out," said the watchman, "and that fetched me to the side of the wharf at a run, but I 'd heard nothing afore that. I got a scare at first, 'cause I thought some one was killing the pair o' you."

"Nobody touched either of us, thanks," said Jack. "It was queer, though. The fellow never said a word. In fact, it might have been a ghost; only I heard the creak of the door-knob when he turned it, and I could distinctly

hear him running along the deck. Ghosts don't patter about the deck in bare feet, do they, Cap'n Crumbie?"

"'T ain't no ghost," grunted the watchman. "It must be the same chap who came aboard her last night, and ghosts don't float around in dories; leastwise I never heard of 'em doing it. No, it 's something he 's after, but what in thunder that might be I dunno."

"I wish to goodness I knew," said Jack. "It 's—it 's worse than ghosts. I believe it is some one who wants to steal the sloop. If they knew how to handle her they could sail miles away before morning, and then if they painted her name out it would n't be easy to trace her."

"But if some one wants to steal her, why should he come into the cabin?" asked George. "He never dreamed there might be some one on board, and all he had to do was cast off."

"Maybe the feller just peeped inside to make sure he was n't doin' any kidnapping," suggested the watchman. "He 'd ha' been in a rare fix if he 'd got out to sea and then found he had the owner aboard with him all the time!"

"We 're only guessing, anyway," said Jack. "And there 's nothing to tell us whether we 're anywhere near the truth or not. All the same, I 'm glad I slept on board, or I don't know what might have happened. And here 's another thing. I 'm going to sleep on board to-morrow night, too, and every other night, for a while. You can't sit on the deck of the sloop all night, Cap'n Crumbie, and if some one was n't right on the spot every minute I believe this mysterious chap would get away with her."

"I 'm going to sleep on board, too," said George.

"All right," agreed the watchman. " 'T ain't such a bad idea, at that; only you want to keep your light going all the time. Not that you 'll catch anybody that way, but you 'll be safest."

The lantern in the cabin had now been lighted, and the boys returned to their bunks, as there seemed no likelihood of any further excitement that night.

At dawn the skipper went on deck, and looked around as though half expecting to find evi-

dence of the previous night's encounter. Everything on the sloop was just as he had left it the previous afternoon after his last run across the ferry. Not even—

Suddenly the boy came to a standstill and stared down, his brows knit. Then he began to chuckle softly, and returned to the cabin.

"George, ahoy!" he said. "Wake up, lazy, and come out! I 've something to show you."

The mate opened his eyes and stretched.

"What 's up now?" he asked, yawning.

"I want to offer you my compliments," said Jack.

"Something must be wrong with you, Cap'n. You 're too polite to me this morning."

"No, it 's genuine gratitude," replied the skipper. "Your father was right when he said you could n't do carpentering-work for nuts."

"Shoot!" replied George, with an air of suspicion.

"We mended that broken place on the rail together, did n't we?" said Jack.

"Well, you sawed the piece and I nailed it on," agreed George.

"Yes. And not knowing better, you left the sharp end of a nail sticking up. Come and look at it."

George hopped out of the bunk and followed his chum on deck.

A fragment of gray cloth was adhering to the sharp point.

"It 's our ghost-trap!" said Jack.

The mate knelt down and inspected the thing curiously.

"This is where he slid over the side, and tore his coat, or his pants, maybe," the younger lad commented sagely. "All the same, I don't see how that helps us any."

"It does n't, in a way," agreed Jack. "But it 's what the detective chaps would call a clue."

"What to?" George asked, laughing.

"I don't know," replied the captain. "A clue 's a clue, chump! You 've got to have clues before you can catch anybody."

"Don't see how you can catch a ghost just because he tore his pants on a nail," commented George.

"Now, George Santo, *do* ghosts wear pants?"

"Not this season," replied George. "Hullo, Cap'n Crumbie," he added, calling to the watchman who had just appeared on the edge of the wharf. "Come and see what our ghost left behind!"

The watchman scrambled down the rough ladder on one of the piles, and with a judicial air viewed the fragment of cloth.

"Aye," he said at length, "that 's just about where he slid over the side the night afore. But I reckon we 've seen the last o' that customer."

"You mean you don't think he 'll come back?" queried Jack.

The watchman slowly nodded his head.

"It 's a pretty poor sort o' fish that bites at the bait a second time, after feelin' the hook," he commented. "An' if I 'm any judge, this is n't a fish o' that kind. He 's cute. Nobody 's seen him. Nobody 's heard him speak. There 's a hundred million people in the United States, and so far as you or I know, it might be any one of 'em. All we got is a bit of his pants to go by, and if you arrested every man in

Greenport who has met with a little accident o' that kind, we 'd have the jail full. No, Jack, your fish has got away this time, an' if he comes back it won't be in the same way; you mark my words."

"I shall sleep on board, though," declared the captain of the sloop.

"Sure thing! That 's the only way to keep him off. What licks me is, what 's he after?"

"There 's something queer about it all," commented Jack, puzzled. "Maybe that 's the last we shall see of the chap, though."

"But you did n't see him," replied Cap'n Crumbie. "That 's where he 's clever."

That evening the two boys returned to the sloop after supper, Jack determined to defend his own property if necessary, and George equally determined to stand by his chum. They took something on board to read, and settled themselves comfortably. Presently, however, George threw down his book. Fiction seemed tame compared with the possibilities around him.

"I asked Dad to-day if he 'd lend us his re-

volver," the mate said. "But he did n't seem to fancy the idea."

"What was he afraid of? That we might shoot ourselves?"

"I don't think that was it," replied George. "He 's afraid one of us might blaze away at the first person who came on board, and make an awful mess of the wrong party."

"That would be awkward, for the wrong party. After all, I 'd rather depend on this stick. I 'd pity any one who got a real crack from it. I was thinking just now, though, George, it might n't be a bad idea to tell the police what 's happened."

"Oh, they 'd only laugh at us."

"Why?"

"Well, because. We 've got nothing to tell them, really. A man came aboard one night and tore his clothes on a nail. What about it? They 'd tell you nobody could be arrested for that."

Jack drummed his fingers thoughtfully on the top of the table.

"I don't care whether they laugh or not,"

he said at length. "I 'm going to report what happened. Maybe they can see further through a brick wall than I can. That 's what they 're for. I 'm going now. Coming up with me?"

George reached for his shoes, and three minutes later the boys were on their way to the police station. In the grim and unfamiliar surroundings of the chief's office, where the boys were received, Jack felt a little less sure of himself.

"What can I do for you?" asked the officer.

"You know the *Sea-Lark,* the boat I 'm using for the ferry?" Jack asked.

The chief nodded, and tapped a writing-pad on his desk with the point of a pencil. Though attentive, he was not much concerned, for other affairs were pressing.

"Well, some mysterious person has been coming on board her at night," said Jack.

"What sort of a person?" asked the chief, stifling a yawn.

"I don't know exactly. It was dark, and we could n't see him."

"Well, what happened?"

"Why, nothing, exactly," replied Jack. "It was about midnight and I heard some one prowling about on the deck. He opened the companionway door into the cabin and I jumped out of my bunk, ready to hit him with a stick, but he bolted."

"Were you attacked?" There was something extremely matter-of fact about the direct question.

"I did n't get hurt, if that is what you mean."

"But were you attacked? Did this mysterious person attempt to strike you or anything like that?"

"He did n't have time. You see I was ready for him with the stick when he opened the door." Jack was a little discouraged by the lack of interest which the chief displayed. The latter seemed to be preoccupied and quite without sympathy.

"Did this person steal anything?"

"No. There was n't much he could have stolen."

"Then all it amounts to is this: Somebody walked across the deck of your sloop in the early

hours of the morning and opened the door of the cabin. You have n't got much of a case for us to handle, young man.'' He smiled, but there was something rather ironical about that smile. ''Even if we found this midnight visitor of yours—which I hardly think is likely, as you don't know what he looks like, and you don't really know whether it 's a man or a woman—what would you like us to charge him with? Certainly not theft. And you know as well as I do that there is 'nt anything so very peculiar about a man walking across the deck of another man's boat, whatever the time of day or night. I 've done it myself, dozens of times. Sometimes one has to, to get ashore.''

''But he opened the door of the cabin.''

The chief shrugged.

''Well, what of it?'' he queried. ''It may have been some sailor or fisherman who was curious to see what it looked like inside. Or, again, it may have been some one who was looking for a place to sleep for an hour or two, and he never dreamed there was any one aboard.''

''It does n't sound very much, if you look at

it like that, does it?" Jack said, nonplussed by the cold and logical attitude of the chief. "But I thought we ought to come up and let you know."

"That 's all right," replied the official. "But I guess there 's nothing to be alarmed about."

"Oh, I forgot," said Jack, feeling in his pocket, "we found a sort of a clue. The man tore his clothes on a nail as he slipped over the side, and next morning this was sticking on the nail."

The chief examined the scrap of material gravely for a moment.

"It 's a wonder he did n't come back and kick up a row with you for leaving nails sticking up," he said, handing back the fragment of cloth. "If I were you I 'd say nothing more about that, or you 'll maybe having some one come and pitch into you."

Jack bit his lip. Evidently he was wasting his time here, and the off-hand manner of the chief gave him no particular reassurance.

"I should be rather pleased if the man who got on to that nail did come and kick up a row,"

he said. "Then I should know who it was."

"How would that help you? He 's done nothing unlawful, as far as I can make out."

"I suppose he has n't, really," Jack was compelled to admit. "All the same, I 'm glad I came up and told you."

"Don't you worry, son," said the chief, rising from his chair as a signal that the interview was over. "If anything more happens, though, you let me know."

"Thank you," said Jack, dubiously, turning toward the door.

"When you come to think of it," observed George, as they walked in the direction of the boat, "we had n't an awful lot to complain of, had we?"

"I don't know about that," replied Jack. "It does n't sound very serious when you have to admit that no actual crime has been committed. I 'm not at all satisfied. I was going to tell the chief about that man Martin, but I saw it was n't any use. My guess is as good as any one else's, and my guess is that Martin was the man who tore something or other on that

nail. I 've got no real reason for saying so, mind you, and perhaps it is n't fair to Martin to suspect him, but there is n't any one else to suspect."

"I looked as closely as I could to-day at his coat and pants," said George, "in case there was any sign of a tear."

"So did I. I did n't see anything, of course."

"No."

"What did you notice, though?" Jack asked. "I mean something that fitted in with the clue?"

"Nothing."

"Well, I could swear he had a different suit on from the one he generally wears," Jack declared. "Unfortunately I had n't taken particular notice before."

"Now you mention it, I believe that 's right, too," agreed George. "But I know what the police would tell you if you pointed that out. They 'd say a man could n't be arrested for having two suits of clothes. And he could n't, of course, or else both you and I would be in prison."

That night Jack decided not to keep the lan-

tern burning. As he explained to the mate, they were not sleeping on board so much for the purpose of keeping people off the boat, as to find out who it was who was displaying such peculiar interest in her. They stayed awake until rather late, chatting, with occasional pauses in which they both listened intently when some trifling sound caught their ears, but toward twelve o'clock both dropped off to sleep, and awoke next morning without having been disturbed.

When the following Sunday came the weather was perfect, and Tony gave his young apprentices permission to take Mrs. Farnham and her family outside the breakwater. They sailed past Greenport Lighthouse on the tip of the Point, and manœuvered for an hour or two in the broad ocean. Mrs. Farnham expressed herself as delighted with the trip, and Rodney, who had rarely been in a sailing-craft since his father had acquired their motor-boat, declared he was as much in love with the old *Sea-Lark* as ever.

"If you like her as much as that," said Jack,

jokingly, "you had better sign on as one of my crew."

"I would, like a shot, if you 'd let me," replied Rod.

"Well, if you mean that, report for duty in the morning. My mate won't be able to help, as he has to do something for his father, and I expect we shall be pretty busy at the ferry."

"You don't mind, do you, Mother?" asked Rod.

"Not if it amuses you," replied Mrs. Farnham. "I would rather trust you in the *Sea-Lark* than in that canoe of yours, any time."

And in this way Rodney Farnham was unofficially "signed on." The more Jack knew the city lad the more he liked him. They were about the same age, and had very similar tastes, and they became excellent companions, despite the fact that one was working hard through the vacation to help his father, and the other attended an expensive New York school and could have spent most of his time, had he chosen, in rolling about in a luxurious limousine. But the sea had a fascination for Rod. He was never so

happy as when, dressed in a flannel shirt, more-or-less-white trousers, and sneakers, he stood on the swaying deck of the little sloop, jumping to obey the captain's orders and feeling the sting of the fresh salt air on his cheeks. He and George, also, became chums, and the three boys spent many a happy hour on the sloop. Their trips in her, now, were not always limited to the regular run between Garnett and Sayer's wharf and the Point, for Tony considered they were perfectly capable of sailing out beyond the breakwater, in favorable weather, so long as they kept within a mile or so of shore; and Cap'n Crumbie was not long in arranging for them to take out occasional pleasure parties. Sometimes during the evenings and on Sundays they ran down the coast, almost as far as Mackerel Point, and at others, when the wind was more suitable, they chose the direction of Indian Head, there to run within a mile or two of the place where the now dancing *Sea-Lark* had lain so long in her sandy bed.

Once, when the sloop was gliding under Indian Head, Jack looked up at its well-remem-

bered outline, and his fancy drifted back to other days.

"Rod, have you ever been an Injun?" he asked.

"How do you mean? Played at being one?"

"Yes. In full war-paint and feathers, scalping the enemy, and hunting buffalo, and taking hostages, and following the trail of palefaces, and tomahawking them?"

"No," said Rod. "I 'd have liked it finely, but we never seemed to get a chance to hunt even that sort of buffalo in New York. I wish I had."

"See that headland?" the skipper queried. "That 's the place where Sitting Bull and White Fox made their famous stand, with their backs to the edge of the cliff. The Iroquois had attacked them in thousands, and killed all the defenders' braves. But Sitting Bull and White Fox outwitted the enemy. They had a trap laid, and the invaders all fell into a hole, where they were left to die, and Sitting Bull and White Fox lived happily ever after."

"They must have been lonely," commented

Rod. "I 've never heard of this bit of history. What sort of a trap was it?"

"I don't exactly remember," replied Jack. "It must have been about eight years ago. There 's White Fox sitting on the deck-house now, laughing at you. Beat him on the head with a belaying-pin for me, will you, please? That 's the place where we used to play Injuns when we were kids."

More than once, these days, Jack came across the man named Martin who had asked the captain to sell the *Sea-Lark*. He crossed in the ferry occasionally, apparently going for the sail only, as he either returned to the town without going ashore or strolled aimlessly about until the sloop returned to the Point. Jack's instinctive dislike for the fellow deepened, a state of affairs which was by no means remedied by Martin's attempts to get on a friendly footing with the owner of the sloop. His manner was difficult to understand. He was impudent, in a way, and yet he cringed; and it was his cringing more than his impudence which made him repellent to Jack.

"Why does that chap hang 'round so much?" Rod asked one day.

"Nobody knows. He 's a mystery to me," replied Jack.

"I 'd like a little accident to happen while he was standing on the edge of the wharf," observed Rod, quietly. "If I should happen to trip and bump into him so that he fell over, he would n't have quite such a mean smile when we fished him out."

"Better not," replied Jack, reluctantly. "After all, he is n't doing any harm, but I wish he 'd find some other wharf to loaf about on. Sometimes I feel as though he were trying to hypnotize me as he stands and stares down at us. The worst of it is you can't go up to a man and ask him what in thunder he means by looking at you, especially when you 're running a public ferry.

"No," replied Rod, "but there 's no law in the world to prevent me from accidentally tripping up and giving him a ducking. He 'd find somewhere else to stand around after that."

"Suppose he could n't swim! No, I 'd love

to do it, but it 's too risky. Maybe he 's a detective, for all we know, waiting at the ferry to catch some one. Leave him alone for the present. The thing is beginning to get interesting."

And it grew still more interesting within an hour or so of that conversation. Jack and the two boys had just returned from a run over to the Point with a boat-load of passengers, when Cap'n Crumbie waved his hand to the skipper, from the wharf. The lads trooped up together.

"*Some*thing 's up!" said the watchman, with a mysterious air, glancing toward two retreating figures which at that moment disappeared round the corner into Main Street.

CHAPTER VIII

JACK COUNTS HIS PROFITS

"WELL, what is it?" asked Jack. "Did our friend turn out to be a detective after all and arrest some one?"

"Not so far," replied the Cap'n. "When he shows me his badge I 'll believe he 's a cop, but not otherwise. You would n't think he could say 'boo' to a goose, would you? But he can! A holy terror, that 's what he is, when he starts, though he looks as though butter would n't melt in his mouth."

"But what happened?" George demanded.

"Pretty near everything, except blue murder!" replied Cap'n Crumbie. "After you left he was hanging around here as usual, when another chap came down to the wharf. I was standing at the door o' my cabin and the second feller did n't see me. I ran my optics over him,

'cause I see he was a stranger to these parts. Well, he walked down all peaceful-like, kind o' strolling, as though he had the whole day to himself. Martin did n't see him coming, 'cause he was leaning up against one of the piles, at the edge o' the wharf. Number Two had his hands in his pockets, and was as happy as a May morning, till all of a sudden he seemed to recognize Martin. He whipped his hands out of his pockets, leaned forward a bit, and said something in a low voice which sounded to me like 'Whitey.' Martin swung round as though he 'd heard a rattlesnake.

" 'Hegan!' he said to Number Two, looking mighty surprised. 'What are you doing here?'

" 'Same thing that you are, I s'pose,' says Hegan. 'Did n't expect to see me for a while yet, eh?'

" 'Well, you 're too late,' says Martin.

"And that started it. What they were talking about I did n't understand exactly. All I could make out was that Hegan did n't believe he was too late for something or other, and Martin got so het up he come near to having a fit.

The things he said to Number Two war n't never heard in no chapel, and why Hegan did n't punch him is more than I can make out. Hammer and tongs they went at it, but Hegan did n't lose his temper as much as the other chap. He 'd made up his mind about whatever it was, and did n't mean to give way.

"All of a sudden, Martin spotted me, and as quick as a wink he calmed down as meek as a lamb. He muttered something to the other feller so low that I could n't hear, and next thing you know Number Two produces a cigar-case and they both lights up and walks away as nice and calm as if nothing had ever happened. They had n't got off the wharf when you landed."

"Mysteriouser and mysteriouser!" commented Jack. "I 've got a feeling that something is going to happen to some one, somehow."

"Captain Brains, of the good ship *Sea-Lark!*" the mate observed, grinning.

"But, joking aside," said Rod, "there does seem to be something in the wind, does n't

there? What do you think of it, Mr. Crumbie?''

''*Cap'n* Crumbie, at your service,'' the watchman corrected, with a reproving glance.

''My mistake, *Cap'n*. But you 're the only one who saw the two quarreling. You don't agree with Jack that this Martin may be a detective looking for some one? The other chap, Hegan, may be another detective, and they 're both after the same person. That would explain what you overheard.''

''Son,'' the watchman replied, ''I 've been a law-abidin' citizen all my life, and the police have n't been much in my line. But I 've got two eyes in my head, and I 've never seen a police officer yet, in uniform or out of it, who had n't got his business written all over him. No, if either of 'em has ever seen a badge, it was only when it had to be shown to 'em!''

''You seem to study human nature a lot,'' said Rod. ''Do you remember Mr. Harmon, who has been staying at our bungalow for the last ten days?''

'' 'Course I do,'' replied the Cap'n.

"Has n't he been coming to Greenport for the last ten years? You mean the chap who stood on this very wharf two days since and talked to me for over an hour."

"That 's Mr. Harmon," Rod agreed. "Now, you 're a fairly good judge of people. What would you guess he was?"

"Ho! I don't have to make no guess about him," said the watchman, scornfully. "I *know*. But then I 've known him so long, and I could n't go wrong."

"Well, what is he?" asked Rod.

"Why, an artist, o' course. You can spot 'em every time. They don't seem to know nothing much outside paint an' sketching. But he collects butterflies, too. Showed me one he said he 'd paid fifteen dollars for, and it was n't much bigger than my two thumb-nails, so I laughed at him."

"You did!" said Rod, smiling. "Why, Cap'n Crumbie?"

"I 've seen butterflies that *were* butterflies, in my time," replied the watchman. "Sailors get chances o' that kind, you know. What with

what I 've seen''—he cast a sidelong glance at Jack and George, knowing he could not stretch the bow too far before them—''and heard from shipmates, I was able to tell him all about the big butterflies in the South Pacific islands. Pretty nigh as big as my hat, some of 'em are, flying all over the place, and to be had for the catching, without paying any fifteen dollars a time, either.''

Rod roared with laughter.

''He took it all in, of course?'' the boy asked at last.

'' 'Course he did. 'T ain't funny,'' protested the Cap'n, knocking the ashes out of his pipe with unnecessary violence.

''But it *is* funny,'' replied Rod. ''You see, Mr. Harmon's hobby is butterflies and he spends half his time and lots of money traveling around to places like the South Sea islands after them.''

''Well I 'm blest!'' commented the watchman, with an inward twinge at the memory of some of the wilder statements he had made to Mr. Harmon. ''Did n't know these artist chaps ever made lots o' money like that.''

"That 's funnier still," replied Rod, with a broader smile. "He only paints pictures for fun, on vacations."

"Now, who 'd ha' thought that!" was Cap'n Crumbie's pensive reply.

During the next forenoon, Jack in view of what the watchman had told them, was not surprised to see the man who called himself Martin appear on the dock with a companion. And from the mysterious and yet eloquent signs which Cap'n Crumbie made, both with his index-finger and with his left eye, the lid of which drooped in an unmistakable wink, Jack realized that the individual with him was his opponent of the previous day.

Hegan was no more like the popular idea of a detective than his companion. He was a short, bull-necked person, with red, beefy hands, a bold, determined, and also unshaven face, an insolent air, and bright, beady eyes which darted about restlessly. He smoked cigars incessantly, lighting one from the stub of another.

The two men were waiting at the end of the wharf when the ferry returned from the Point,

and stepped on board as soon as the other passengers had disembarked.

"Well, how 's business?" Martin asked, addressing Jack the moment he got on board. He spoke in a tone which Jack regarded as a shade too free and easy, considering the length of time they had known each other.

"Very good, thanks," he replied quietly.

"How much is the fare?" asked Hegan, pulling a handful of coins out of his pocket. "Ten cents? Here 's fifty for you."

Jack accepted the half-dollar, and handed back the change.

"Only ten cents a head," he said. "If you want to go for a sail in the harbor you can pay more, of course."

"That 's a good idea," declared Hegan. "What d' you say, Martin? A little run round the bay, huh? You won't be seasick? Go to it, son," he added, addressing the captain. "We 'll have a full dollar's worth."

And as the *Sea-Lark* sped away, Cap'n Crumbie, standing on the edge of the wharf, with his hands jammed down into his pockets, and his

eyes on the little craft slipping into the distance, shook his head slowly and soberly.

"Now, I wonder where I 've seen that chap Hegan afore," he muttered. "Maybe it was a long time ago, and maybe it was n't such a long time. *But I 've seen him afore, somewhere.*"

Meanwhile, with exaggerated friendliness, Hegan was endeavoring to gain a friendly footing with the crew of the sloop.

"Nothing like a sail on the briny for your health," he declared. "My friend Martin talked about buying a boat some time since, but he 's changed his mind now. Says he might be going back to New York before long, and he could n't take it along with him. I 'd like to see him trying to navigate a sloop o' this size up Broadway. Ha, ha! Well, well, you boys certainly are three good sailors! And a very nice boat you have here, too. We must come for a sail in her again. We 've nothing to do just now—on a vacation, you know. This boat must be thirty feet long. A good broad beam, too. And I 'll bet she has a nice little cabin. Come down and have a peek below deck, Martin."

Jack, at the wheel, watched them descend the companion and enter the cabin, where they remained only a few moments. He heard them conversing in low tones and though he could not have explained it, he felt relieved when they reappeared on deck. It seemed to him, however, that an indefinable change had come over the two passengers in that short interval. Hegan was, if anything, a shade more affable, and, slapping his thigh heartily, laughed boisterously at every little joke he made.

"They 're a queer couple, are n't they?" commented Jack, when the men had gone ashore again at the wharf.

Rod was sitting on the top of the deck-house, with his eyes narrowed as he watched their late passengers walk away.

"I give it up," he said. "It 's none of our business what they 're after, of course, and they 're too deep for me." He paused for a moment, with his head held on one side reflectively. Then: "Jack, I can't help wondering whether one of those chaps knows anything

about that person who was prowling about the sloop at midnight."

Jack nodded and looked up into the clear blue sky, as though seeking inspiration.

"I have wondered that myself," he said. "But what 's the use of wondering? As Cap'n Crumbie says, there are a hundred million people in the United States, and it might have been any one of them."

During the first few weeks while the ferry was running Jack had purposely avoided giving his father exact figures of what the *Sea-Lark* had earned, as he wished to save up a pleasant surprise for him. More than once Mr. Holden had made inquiries on the subject, expressing the hope that his son was not being disappointed.

"You 're looking better for it, anyway, my lad," he declared one evening while they were sitting together on the porch of the cottage. "Not that you were sick, but a month out in the sea air all day makes a difference to any one. If you don't gain any more than that we shan't have anything to grumble at, shall we?"

"N-no," replied Jack. "But you 'd rather

the sloop and I fetched a dollar or two in, would n't you?''

''You know well enough I 'd be thankful, Jack. We can do with all that comes our way these days. Not that I 'd have you spend it, though. If you do get a little in hand this season I want you to put it away in the bank and keep it there safely till we absolutely can't do without it. By the way, you ought to get those sails and halyards paid for. Debts are no good to any one. Promise me you 'll pay for them as soon as you take enough money to meet the bill.''

Jack smiled.

''I settled up for those long ago,'' he replied, entering the house and going over to a cupboard where he usually kept his own particular property. Taking out a small wooden box, he returned to the porch, placing it in an empty chair by his father's side.

''What have you got there?'' Mr. Holden asked.

''The family treasure-chest,'' replied his son. ''It is n't awfully full, of course, but I intended

to reach a certain sum before I handed any of it over to you. Guess how much there is."

"Five dollars," said Mr. Holden, immediately.

"What, Dad? Do you think I 've been running that packet of mine for over a month and only made as much as that? Spread this paper on your knees and I 'll tip it all out so that you can count for yourself."

Jack opened the box and upset the contents of the box on his father's lap. There were clean bills and dirty bills, dimes, nickels, quarters, and half dollars. Mr. Holden raised his eyebrows.

"Why, son, you 've got a good little pile here!" he declared.

It was not without a certain sense of pride that Jack watched his father adding up the contents of his treasure-chest. For it was almost the first money he had ever earned, and every dime there represented one passenger carried across the ferry, to say nothing of the dimes he had handed over to his mate.

"Thirty-two dollars!" declared Mr. Holden,

at last. "Jack, you 're a wizard! How did you do it?"

"Did n't you think I should do as well as that?" the boy asked.

"Why, no, not in this short while," replied Mr. Holden. "Not after you 'd paid for your paint and your fittings, and paid your crew, too."

"Well, there are two more months yet, Dad," said Jack, hopefully, "and I ought to do even better during the rest of the season. You see, the people over on the Point are beginning to depend on the ferry. We always run on time, once an hour, and only miss the trip when the weather makes it impossible. The more the people learn to look for us, the better it is for the treasure-chest."

"I shall have to look to my laurels," said Mr. Holden, "or you 'll be making more than I do. Now, don't keep this in the house. Take it down to the bank, where it will be safe. You—you know, I 've never felt too safe with money lying round since—that night—"

Mr. Holden's voice trailed into silence, leav-

ing his sentence unfinished, but Jack knew what night he was thinking of, and he answered soberly: "All right, Dad."

He gathered up the bills and coins and replaced them in the wooden box. "I 'll keep it all together till the end of the season, and then I 'll hand it over to you."

The throb of an automobile caught the lad's ear, and he looked down the street. A large limousine was approaching the cottage.

"Why, that 's the Farnhams' car," he said, going to the end of the porch. A moment later the vehicle stopped in front of the cottage, and Rodney jumped out.

"I 've brought some one to see you," he called. Jack needed no second glance to know that the prosperous-looking gentleman who followed on the heels of Rodney was the lad's father.

"So you 're the young captain of the *Sea-Lark,* are you?" asked Mr. Farnham, pleasantly. "I had n't been at home an hour before Rod insisted on my driving over to see you. And this is your father? Glad to meet you, Mr.

Holden. Your boy has made a real business enterprise of it, I understand. Well," he added, turning to Jack, "and how do you like the sloop?"

"She 's just perfect, sir, thanks," replied Jack, a little shyly. "I—I 'm awfully obliged to you for letting me have her."

"That 's all right," said Mr. Farnham. "Don't forget your promise to take me for a sail in her sometime."

"Why, of course, she is yours to use whenever you like, sir," replied Jack.

"She 's not mine, at all!" replied the man, laughing. "You 're the only one who has any claim on her now. Besides, I have the motorboat. All the same, I 'm coming down some day soon for that sail. I want to see how you and your merry men manage her."

CHAPTER IX

THE SEA-LARK TO THE RESCUE

JACK was whistling cheerfully as he cleaned out his boat. As the sloop's regular berth was occupied by one of Garnett and Sayer's schooners, which was taking in ice for a trip, Jack had tied up across the slip to one of Simon Barker's boats. He looked round with a start when a gruff voice hailed him from the wharf, and saw Simon Barker himself glaring down from the string-piece.

"Get out of that!" Mr. Barker ordered gruffly.

The boy, puzzled for a moment, as he was doing no harm, looked back in frank astonishment.

"D'ye hear me? Get out of that!" the shipowner repeated, more truculently. "What d'ye mean by rubbing the paint off my boat?"

Silently Jack cast off, and let the *Sea-Lark* swing back across the slip.

"Don't let me catch you over here again!" bellowed Mr. Barker, as he made his way back toward his office at the head of the wharf.

"Don't you worry about that," muttered Jack, smarting, as he fended the sloop from a spile and tossed her line over it. "You would n't have found me there then if I 'd realized where I was." He looked disgustedly after the ship-owner, whose back was disappearing through a doorway. "I would n't tie up to one of your old tubs if it were the only thing afloat, you old skinflint!"

But in that Jack was mistaken, as events soon proved.

Two days later there came a blustery, rainy day—the sort of weather known to the down-east fishermen as a "smoky so'easter." For a brief spell summer was in a grumpy mood. Drizzle fell constantly, and sharp gusts of wind swept at intervals across the harbor. Jack, having made one profitless run across to the Point, was wondering whether or not there was

any chance of the sun taking another peep at Greenport that day. He hoped that for once Cap'n Crumbie was wrong in his assertion that it was going to last till nightfall. George was not on board that morning, as it was one of the days when his father needed assistance, but Rodney had joined the sloop, in no wise discouraged by the weather. Both boys were enveloped in oilskins.

While the *Sea-Lark* was lying at her berth Cap'n Crumbie strolled to the edge of the wharf, casting a glance far out to sea for some sign of a break.

"There 's a schooner in trouble down near Four Fathom Shoal," he announced. "They 've just telephoned from the Light about her."

"A Greenport schooner?" Jack asked.

"Don't know," replied the watchman. "The light-keeper said he could only just make her out in the haze."

"Is she ashore on the shoal?"

"Don't seem to be. As far as he can see, she 's a bit to the south o' the shoal, but she 's

had her sticks blown out of her, or something.''

''I have n't seen the tug go off,'' observed Jack.

''She ain't here, but Barker's on the job, all right. He 's scared stiff lest the schooner is one o' his boats. Should n't wonder if she is. The *Grace and Ella* ought to ha' got in last night, but she did n't.''

''The *Grace and Ella!*'' repeated Jack. The name had a peculiar significance for him. That was the schooner which his own father had owned in partnership with Simon Barker when the robbery had led to the severing of their business relations.

''I hope it is n't the *Grace and Ella,*'' said the boy anxiously. ''Somehow—I don't know —well, she is n't in the family now, of course, but all the same I hate the idea of anything happening to her.''

''So does Barker!'' grinned the watchman, whose sympathies lay more with the men on the schooner than with the owner's pocket. ''His tug went up to Rockmore this morning with a tow, and he 's hanging on to the telephone and

nearly having a fit, trying to get hold o' Burke, the cap'n."

"Rockmore is a tidy distance off," commented Jack. "Anything might happen to the schooner by the time the tug reaches her from there. But the schooner is n't ashore, you say?"

"Not as far as the light-keeper could make out. And the tide is making the other way, so she 'll be all right for a while, so long as she ain't leaking bad."

Jack looked up sideways at the gloomy sky. Though the wind was coming in puffs, it by no means had the force of a gale.

"What do you say to a run out there, Rod?" he asked suddenly, turning to his friend.

"Out where? To Four Fathom Shoal?" His face lighted up at the prospect of such an adventure. "I 'm game, if you are."

"Why not?" said Jack. "I don't know that we could do much when we got there, but the sloop can make it easily enough, and you never know! They might be jolly glad to let us bring them ashore."

"Well, I ain't saying you would n't get there safe," observed Cap'n Crumbie, "though you 'd have to tack all the way against this so'easter. But the tug may get there afore you can."

"According to you, though, the tug has n't started from Rockmore yet," protested Jack. "There is n't a soul wants to go across the ferry at present, so why should n't we make the run?"

"Go to it!" said the watchman. "Nobody 's stopping you."

"Come on, Rod," said Jack, suiting the action to the word and a few moments later the sloop was standing straight down the harbor, past Gull Island, past the end of the breakwater, out into the open. Jack found the sea was rougher than he had anticipated when they came abreast of Greenport Light, but the wind was nothing to cause alarm. The *Sea-Lark* danced and cavorted, heeling well over as she raced up one side of a green sea and dived down the other. The water boiled in her wake, for Jack was carrying every stitch of canvas he could spread to the breeze.

Thump-thumpety-thump! went the curling

crests of waves as they slapped her bow. Always she rose before the onrushing swirl like a bird in fact as well as in name, but sometimes the crest curled a little higher, swished up at her prow, and shot over the deck, drenching everything on board. Several times her cockpit was awash, and some of the water went down the companionway into the cabin, but the rest gushed back through the scuppers into the sea.

"This rain must have got worse since the light-keeper telephoned," Jack said when they had run a mile south of the breakwater and he was thinking of swinging over on to the other tack. "The shoal is four miles away from the Point, and you can't make anything out more than half a mile away now. It may let up again soon, though. Keep your eyes skinned, Rod."

Jack came about as soon as he had room to run clear of the Point's eastern shore. The loom of the shore was hazy, and as soon as he went about once more and bore away almost due south the mist swallowed up the coast-line entirely. The wind sang shrilly in the rigging and the boys' faces smarted with the salt spume

which whipped their cheeks and at times half blinded them.

"Want to go back?" Jack shouted to his chum, jokingly, when the *Sea-Lark* in a particularly playful moment had kicked up her heels and dived with somewhat alarming suddenness down a steep green mountain-side, fetching up at the bottom with a splash and burying her nose.

"Not likely," replied Rod, reveling in the spice of danger which flavored the adventure. "It 's just beginning to be interesting."

"She 'll fairly skate home straight before this wind," replied Jack, laughingly. "Here comes a whopper! Look out! Isn't she a daisy? See the way she rose to it? We must be about half-way out to the Four Fathom bell-buoy now. I thought I heard it ringing just then. Listen!"

Ding-ding-ading! The sound was faintly audible.

"It 's safe enough to keep on till we work our way to that buoy," said Rod. "Dad and I have been as far as that several times in the

motor-boat, but of course only in fine weather."

"I know the shallow water is all to the north of that buoy," replied Jack. "What I 'm worrying about now is, where is the schooner? There does n't seem to be any sign of her. Maybe she 's close up to the shoal."

For another twenty minutes the sloop ran on, tacking occasionally, and ever approaching nearer the sound of the bell-buoy, the melancholy note of which now came clearly enough across the water.

"Hark!" cried Rod, suddenly.

Swish! came the waves against the prow of the sloop. Overhead there was the constant song of the wind in the halyards. The only other thing Jack could hear for a while was the bell-buoy.

"What was it?" he asked after a while.

Just then a gust of wind brought across the water the squawk of a boat's fog-horn.

Conch-conch!

"There she goes! That 's the schooner, all right," cried Jack, swinging the wheel over and heading in the direction of the sound.

Conch-conch! It was more distinct now, the wind bringing it directly toward them.

"The tug has n't arrived, evidently," Jack shouted to his companion. "Did n't I see something away across there just now?" he added, pointing over to the starboard bow and peering into the haze.

"Yes, there she is!" he cried a few moments later, as a vague blur became visible through the rain. "And she 's the *Grace and Ella,* too. But what 's happened to her? There is n't a spar standing!"

Another five-minutes' manœuvering brought the *Sea-Lark* within hail of the distressed vessel, and soon she was under her lee.

"Ahoy, Captain Jordan!" Jack called. "The tug is coming off for you."

"Hello, youngster! Where is she?"

"Don't know. They telephoned up to Rockmore for her. She 'd gone up there with a tow."

"Well, if she ain't quick she won't be a powerful lot o' use to us," replied Captain Jordan. "We could drift home in another month

or two, with this wind. What are you doing out here? This ain't your beat with the ferry."

"Why, I did n't know how bad a fix you might be in," replied Jack. "We could have carried you ashore if the schooner had been sinking. What happened to your masts?"

Only a few yards separated the two craft. The little boat was rising and falling on each wave, Jack keeping her clear, headed up into the wind.

"A squall struck us about four o'clock this morning and made a clean sweep. The dories went, and everything, and afore we knew it the schooner was bumping her bottom out on the shoal. If the tide had n't turned just then we 'd ha' been all broken up by now."

"Well, there 's nothing I can do for you, is there?" asked Jack. Apart from the natural desire to serve those on another craft in trouble, the boy would have been pleased to be of service to Captain Jordan, for he had been on particularly friendly terms with that stalwart fisherman ever since he himself first began to potter about the harbor. Indeed, many a time

he had paddled about in one of the *Grace and Ella's* dories, and despite Mr. Barker's enmity, the lad had received more than one invitation from Captain Jordan to make a trip in the schooner to the fishing-grounds, though he had declined to do so, at the desire of his father.

"You say the tug ain't coming straight out o' Greenport?" the skipper asked.

"No telling when she will be here," replied Jack. "I don't think she can be long, though."

"Well, I 'll have to drop my anchor soon as the tide turns again," replied the fisherman, "unless you like to give us a tow. We can't do a thing now, except wait. We 've got a big trip o' fish aboard, too, and she sprang a leak when she hit the stand. We 've had to keep on pumping."

"I can tow you, all right," replied Jack, "if you 'll pass me a hawser. You won't move so very fast, but I can get you there."

"Well, that 'll be a salvage job, won't it?" said Captain Jordan. "You 'd better put a price on it before we start."

Jack, who had not thought of turning his ad-

venture into a business affair up to that moment, hardly knew what to reply.

"What 's a fair price, Captain?" he asked.

"You 'd better settle that with the owners, after we get ashore."

Jack laughed outright.

"No, thank you," he replied. "Mr. Barker and I are not what you 'd call particularly good friends. What 's it worth to you to be taken into the harbor?"

"If the tug comes along," replied the captain, "it won't cost the owner anything, but there 's no sign of her yet and if we keep on drifting the way we 're headed we 're due to land up on the Big Popple Beach before long. I 'll take the first tow I can find and I guess I would n't kick at five hundred dollars for the job."

There was a gasp from Rodney. Jack blinked once or twice, and the smile vanished from his face. Then:

"Let me have that hawser," he said in a businesslike tone. "Only, Captain, if I start towing you, I want to finish the job."

"Glad to have you," replied Captain Jordan, who, though he did not say so, was by no means heartbroken at the idea of running up a bill against his employer, in the circumstances. For, like everybody else with whom Simon Barker had had any dealings, the captain of the *Grace and Ella* had been a victim of Barker's meanness. Most of the gear on the schooner was little better than junk. To wring a new set of sails out of her owner was one of the hardest tasks in the world. It was just the same with halyards, spars, and everything else aboard that needed to be renewed from time to time after hard wear and tear. Captain Jordan was convinced that the loss of the two masts was due to Barker's stinginess. Twelve months previously the skipper had pointed out a defect in the mainmast and suggested that it would be safer to have the spar replaced, but Barker would not hear of it. It was that mast which gave way first when the squall hit them, and the foremast, unable to bear the additional strain, followed suit. Barker, therefore, was only paying for his own niggardliness.

CHAPTER X

SALVAGE

THE task which Jack had undertaken was not so formidable as it might have been, for everything was in his favor. The end of a manila hawser was cast to him. This he made fast to the quarter-bitts, and then he headed due east to clear the end of Greenport breakwater. When once she felt the strain of the hawser holding her back, the little *Sea-Lark* tugged and fretted like a greyhound puppy at its leash, for she had a dead weight of several hundred tons dragging at her heels. And for a few minutes that dead weight almost seemed to be anchored securely to the bottom of the ocean. But the steady pull of the sloop presently began to tell. The schooner moved sluggishly, reluctantly, but the main point was that she moved, and before long the *Sea-Lark* had enough way on to make a steady three knots an

hour, for the wind could not have been blowing from a more satisfactory quarter.

Exciting moments came when a particularly strong gust swept down on the two craft. With her boom swung away out, to catch the full benefit of the wind, the *Sea-Lark* strained her slender mast now and again more than Jack cared to contemplate. There was no "give" to ease her, with that solid weight dragging astern. Sometimes, also, a following sea hit the sloop viciously, breaking over her quarter, half drenching the boy at her wheel, and pouring down into the cockpit. Once, after the sloop had been struck in this manner, Captain Jordan hailed the *Sea-Lark* from the deck of the schooner.

Putting his hand to his ear Jack turned to listen.

"I 'll send you a man to give a hand if you like," the fisherman shouted down the wind.

Jack could not make his own voice heard in reply, but there was no mistaking the meaning of the wave of his arm, with which he signaled back.

"Not if I know it!" he said emphatically to his companion. "What do you think, Rod?"

"I should say not! Why, we must be almost half-way back now. There would be no fun in it if we let some one else complete the job."

"That 's just what I 'm worrying about," observed Jack. "We 're on the way, all right, and if nobody interrupts us we shall get there safely enough. But where is that tug? I can't even hear her squeaking."

"She must have left Rockmore long ago," said Rod. "They 'd have some difficulty in locating us while this haze keeps as bad as it is now, but they 'll find us, sure enough."

"I wonder what will happen when the tug does bob up," Jack said. "If it arrived just now I don't think I 'd have the cheek to refuse to give up the tow."

"Why not?" So far as Rod could see they were doing perfectly satisfactorily.

"Well," replied Jack with a laugh, "you 've got to remember that we are n't under steam-power, and they are, for one thing. Also, the tug is Barker's boat, and perhaps—"

"Rubbish!" declared Rod. "If you take my advice you 'll hang on as long as the sloop holds together and as long as you 're doing what you contracted to do. Did n't the captain say he was glad to have you give him a tow? And did n't he agree that if you began to tow you could finish it?"

"Well, we 'll see," replied Jack. "I 've got no complaints at present. Never heard of such luck!"

"Five hundred dollars seems an awful lot of money for doing a little bit of a thing like this, though, does n't it?" asked Rodney.

"Yes, it sounds a lot to us, but you must remember that the *Grace and Ella* is worth thousands of dollars and has a full catch of groundfish under her hatches. It is n't exactly the idea of losing the salvage money that makes me hope the tug will miss us somehow, though," he added with a grim smile.

"It 's quite enough reason," observed Rod.

"Yes, but I want to keep this tow till we get right into the harbor," said Jack. "I can't very well be in two places at the same time,

but I 'd give a month's earnings at the ferry to be standing near Mr. Simon Barker and watch his face when he sees this schooner of his being towed in by the *Sea-Lark*. It won't take him more than about a minute to realize that I 'm getting a very nice revenge for something he said to me only a couple of days ago. Slip up for'ard there, Rod, will you? I believe I spotted the Point then, and I want to make sure of my bearings. The haze seems to be clearing off a bit—"

Then something happened which he had been dreading. Across the water, from the direction of Four Fathom bell-buoy, which the *Sea-Lark* had now left full three miles astern, came the sharp, piping call of the tug.

Four short squeaks, a long one, and finally a short one.

"No mistaking *her*," was Rod's only comment. Much to Jack's delight, the captain of the *Grace and Ella* did not attempt to signal back. Such a proceeding would, however, have been difficult anyway, against the wind.

"There 's the Point!" suddenly cried Rod from the bow and a minute later Jack altered his course a shade, for the weather was clearing up rapidly and he saw it was necessary to make a little more southing. At the same time he glanced back over his shoulder. The squawk of the tug was now insistent.

"I believe we shall manage it yet," he said delightedly. "Another twenty minutes or so will take us round the end of the breakwater, and the tug has n't spotted us yet."

But, as he spoke, the rain ceased, and presently the ocean was visible for miles.

"Here she comes!" Jack cried as his eyes fell on the distant shape of the fussy little *Simon P. Barker*. "Tearing along like a snail! And I guess her skipper 's roaring mad now that he can see what happened."

"Keep going! Keep going!" urged Rod, almost dancing with delight.

"You bet I 'm going to keep going!" replied Jack, with the light of battle in his eyes. "He 'd bust his boilers in catching up with us

now, before we 're round the breakwater. Did you ever hear Steve Burke talk when he 's real mad, Rod?"

"I don't remember ever even seeing him."

"Well, you will in a while, and it 's no Quaker meeting he 's coming to, either! He knows what to expect from Mr. Barker as soon as he lands ashore, for missing the schooner. Rod, I 'm not going to let go now. Burke would n't dare to run us down. Of course if Captain Jordan cuts us adrift, that settles it; but my guess is that he won't."

"It 's a pretty race, is n't it!" said Jack, a moment later. "Two tortoises, and one of them hobbled! Thank goodness Burke dare n't drive his old tug any faster, or her rotten engines would shake themselves to pieces."

Meanwhile the irate skipper of the tug was protesting loudly with his squeaky siren. The *Simon P. Barker* wallowed and rolled nearer and nearer, but the *Sea-Lark* was fast approaching the safe refuge of the harbor. Soon the tug was only about a thousand yards astern, but by then Jack was negotiating the end of the

breakwater, and there only remained the straight run up the harbor to the wharf. The tug, however, evidently had no intention of relinquishing her claim, for she fussed up to the heels of the sloop and hailed.

"Let go that hawser!" Burke shouted angrily to Jack.

"Can't do it. I 'm under contract," replied Jack, steadily.

"Well, I 'll bust your contract, and you too, if you don't hand me that hawser mighty quick," Burke snapped back. His practised hand was at the wheel, and the tug was now gliding through the water within a few feet of the *Sea-Lark's* side. Jack, however, did not give way an inch. He was by no means sure that Burke would not bump into him and secure the tow by main force. But the tug's skipper knew just a little too much of sea law to carry his tactics as far as that. At this stage Captain Jordan put in a word.

"Let the lad alone," he shouted. "He came first, and I had to give him the job."

"And what 's your owner going to say to

you?'' Burke yelled back to the captain of the schooner.

''He can say what he likes,'' returned Captain Jordan. ''I 've got a word or two to put into his ear for sending me to sea with rotten spars, and I 've a right to arrange for a tow whenever I think it prudent. Now beat it, or you 'll be having a smash-up yet, and then there 'll be *real* money to pay out.''

With no alternative, Burke sidled away from the two vessels, muttering savagely, but realizing that he could put in no just claim to complete the tow. By that time Gull Island had been reached, and Jack could make out figures on the wharves ahead.

''Jordan is a brick for standing up for you like that,'' Rod said.

''I thought he would,'' replied Jack. ''But, you know, a bargain is a bargain, and we had the law on our side, after all.''

''Our friend Burke looked as though he would like to bite your head off.''

''He was n't very polite about it, was he? But you just wait a few minutes till we draw

up alongside Barker's wharf. That 's when the fun will begin."

They plodded slowly on until Captain Jordan hailed them from the schooner.

"Stand by to cast that hawser off," he directed.

"Aye, aye!" replied Jack. "Rod, lay hold of that line, and be ready to slack away."

"Let go!" shouted Captain Jordan at last.

The hawser fell with a splash into the water, and Jack brought the sloop round into the wind, leaving the *Grace and Ella* with enough way on to sidle to her berth.

An angry face appeared at the edge of the wharf.

"What d 'ye mean by meddling in my affairs?" demanded Mr. Barker, scowling down on the boys.

"Meddling?" said Jack unruffled. "I was giving her a little tow. Does n't she look as though she needed it? It was quite a salvage job."

"Salvage!" Mr. Barker's surprise and consternation were ludicrous. "You get no sal-

vage out o' me, young man! No one asked you to interfere. What do you suppose I sent my tug out for?''

''Tug did n't come in time,'' put in Captain Jordan. ''I had to engage the sloop to make sure.''

''You engaged her?'' queried Barker in horrified tones.

''What else could I do?'' retorted Captain Jordan. ''The tide would have turned in another twenty minutes. Maybe you would n't have minded the schooner being piled up on the sand, but I minded.''

''Then you 'll pay for it,'' snarled Barker. ''I won't. No, sir! Not a red cent! What did you arrange to pay this—this kid?''

''Five hundred dollars, and—''

''Five hundred!'' echoed Mr. Barker in agony.

''Why not? He saved you perhaps ten times that much.'' Captain Jordan was becoming annoyed at having to bandy words of this order from ship to wharf.

Simon Barker leaned over and wagged his

finger in the direction of the captain of the *Sea-Lark.*

"Don't you think for one minute," he spluttered, "that I 'll ever pay it."

"We 'll see," replied Jack, quietly.

There were few patrons for the ferry that day, and after landing Rodney on the Point Jack returned to town and hurried home to his dinner. He reached the house before his father was through and quickly told his story. Mr. Holden was neither hopeful nor helpful.

"Don't have anything to do with the man," he begged. "He 'll find some loophole of escape, and goodness knows there has been unpleasantness enough already."

"But, Dad, I *earned* it!" the boy protested. "Captain Jordan knows what he is talking about. I 'm going to consult a lawyer. Mr. Merrill will see the thing is settled fairly. What 's the use of letting an old skinflint like Barker cheat me out of the money?"

Mr. Holden made a vague motion with his hands.

"If you consult Mr. Merrill you 'll have to

pay him, remember," he said. "Lawyers only cost you money in the end."

"Maybe," said Jack, "but you know quite well I should never be able to get that salvage money without a lawyer's help. I want your permission to put the case in his hands, Dad."

"All right," said Mr. Holden reluctantly.

Five minutes later Jack was explaining to the jovial little lawyer all that had happened.

"Well, Mr. Barker hates to part with his cash," said the man of law. "But I 'll see him in a day or two when he has calmed down, and perhaps he will be in a more reasonable frame of mind then."

Mr. Merrill had the reputation of being able to pour oil on troubled waters more effectively than any other attorney in the county, but for once his skill in such matters proved ineffective. Simon Barker was as obstinate as a mule. He declared he would be sold up and even go to prison rather than pay five hundred dollars to Jack Holden.

"But," said the lawyer, reporting the outcome of his interview to Jack two days later,

"he will pay in the end. He can't help paying. He can fight, and stand us off for a long time if he wants to, but sooner or later, Jack, he 's got to come to terms. So sit tight, my boy, and let Simon and me do the worrying."

CHAPTER XI

THE STRUGGLE IN THE DARK

JACK was by now becoming accustomed to sleeping aboard the *Sea-Lark*. The slight motion of the sloop as she lay at her moorings, and the gentle lapping of water against the side of the craft, instead of keeping him awake, lulled him to sleep. There was a delightful novelty, also, in sleeping on his boat, and the sense of impending danger which, during the first night or two, had kept his ears straining, was beginning to vanish. Both he and George now dropped off to sleep within a few minutes of the light being extinguished.

There was one night, however, when George was not able to keep his chum company, as his father required his assistance very early in the morning to get a launch into the water on the top of the tide. Jack, therefore, had to spend

the night alone. For an hour or so after darkness came, he chatted with Cap'n Crumbie in the latter's cubby on the wharf, and then climbed down to the sloop with no thought of impending danger. In the cabin he lighted his lantern, read the last two chapters of a book, stuck his head out of the companionway to see what the weather was like, and then slipped off his shoes, preparatory to turning in. As he placed the shoes under the bunk he began to chuckle.

"It is n't necessary," he muttered, going over to a locker and taking from it certain articles, including a hammer. "But what a joke if—"

He seemed to find considerable amusement in his thoughts and once or twice his chuckle developed into a hearty laugh, as for several minutes he busied himself at an occupation rarely indulged in by skippers.

"There!" he said, apparently to the hammer, when the task was finished, "it can't do any harm, and it may do some good."

Five minutes later he was in the strange world of dreamland, where pirates and redskins

became entangled inextricably in adventures more absorbing than any ever found between the covers of a book.

Up on the wharf Cap'n Crumbie smoked his pipe in his cubby, and dozed over an old magazine until his head nodded. For a few minutes he, too, dropped off to sleep and then, when his pipe fell on the floor, he sat up with a start. He stretched his arms, yawned, and arose to pace nor'east and so'west on his favorite beat. There was but a faint light, for the moon was not due for several hours yet, and the sky was somewhat cloudy. Due south, three miles away, the red beacon at the sea end of the long breakwater shone steadily, while, farther east, the white glare of Greenport Light came at intervals. Cap'n Crumbie screwed up his eyes as he peered into the darkness away to the south for signs of an incoming vessel, but saw nothing, and presently returned to his comfortable chair and the magazine. He stuffed more tobacco into the bowl of his pipe, sent up prodigious wreaths of smoke, and fixed his spectacles. For half an hour he browsed over the printed

pages, and then, it being a warm, close night, his eyelids drooped once more. Somewhere a bell clanged. It was one o'clock in the morning, and all was well. Cap'n Crumbie dozed and his pipe fell to the floor with a rattle again. But he did not move. The watchman was in the midst of forty winks, and they were very sound winks, too.

The dark form of a dory came skulking along the wharves. There was something suspicious in the behavior of its occupant. He dipped his oars into the water so silently that the splash could not have been heard more than a few yards away. He took a couple of furtive strokes, and then rested, looking over his shoulder, while the dory drifted slowly along. Another two strokes. A voice came from the distance. It was some sailor calling "good night" to a belated visitor, but the man in the dory gave a start. Again he peered over his shoulder in the direction of Garnett and Sayer's wharf, now close by, and after assuring himself that no eye was on him, dipped the oars cautiously and sidled toward the *Sea-Lark*.

There was no sound when he stepped with his bare feet over a thwart to fend the dory from the sloop. This was done with infinite care, and the small craft lay still. The man ran his fingers along the rail until they encountered a projecting nail, and then he nodded silently. With cat-like movements, he pushed the dory along to the stern of the sloop, and stood up, ready to hoist himself aboard. No sound greeted his ears save the lap of water against the side of the vessel. At last he tightened his grip on the rail, pulled his body cautiously over it, and crouched for an instant at the companion-way. His fingers closed on the door-knob and with stealthy tread he disappeared into the cabin.

One step he took in the blackness, and then something tripped him up. It was a strong cord stretched across the bottom of the steps, a foot from the ground. The man had fallen into a booby trap of the simplest possible kind, which Jack had set in the event of any unauthorized callers disturbing his slumbers.

With a startled cry quickly suppressed, the

intruder sprawled forward, clutching wildly, and measured his length on the floor. As he fell his head came in violent contact with the edge of the table.

In a flash Jack was sitting bolt upright, collecting his wits. Then he remembered the booby trap, but he did not laugh now. The thing had evidently done its work.

With a bound he leaped from his berth, grasped his stick, and landed on the intruder, who was already scrambling to his knees. It was now the boy's turn to stumble, but they both recovered at the same moment.

Neither could see the other, although not more than three feet separated them as they instinctively sprang apart.

"Stand still, or I 'll shoot!" called Jack. At the same moment he moved toward the door, but before he could reach it the man was on him and had borne him to the floor.

Jack struggled frantically, but his opponent was stronger than he. A hand was thrust over his mouth and a knee pressed heavily on his chest.

"Keep still, or I 'll crush the life out o' you!" a voice hissed.

But Jack had no intention of keeping still in the circumstances. One of his legs was free, and with it he kicked out lustily, making as much noise as possible, but doing no harm to his assailant.

The hand on Jack's mouth pressed still more firmly. Acting on an inspiration, the boy opened his mouth, and his firm teeth closed on a finger. There was a sharp cry of pain and the hand was withdrawn, whereupon Jack instantly shouted at the top of his lungs.

Down came the hand again across his face, his half-raised head was thrust savagely back against the floor of the cabin, and Jack was momentarily dazed.

"Now will you keep still?" the voice demanded in a hoarse whisper. While one hand was being held across his mouth, the boy felt another close remorselessly over his throat. His left arm was doubled under him, and although his right hand remained free, he could do nothing with it save clutch ineffectually at

the arm of his assailant. The pressure on his throat was terrible and he could no longer breathe. Even then, however, he did not cease to squirm, and his hand encountered the leg of the cabin table. Desperately he closed his fingers over this and using the last ounce of his now fast-dwindling strength, dragged the thing over.

Exactly what happened the boy could not tell, but a moment later he found himself mixed up in a nightmare of table legs and clutching hands. His mouth and throat were freed, and he uttered another loud cry for help, but was immediately silenced by a savage blow on the head. Those powerful hands gripped him afresh and he felt his senses going. He was choking again, and there was a painful buzzing in his ears. Vaguely, as though it were miles away, he thought he heard a shout, and then a ton weight seemed to be lifted from his chest. His assailant had gone, and Jack could hear some one shouting distinctly now.

"Hello! hello, there!" It was Cap'n Crumbie, outside on the wharf. The boy tried to

call back, but for the moment he was too exhausted. Then the watchman burst into the cabin.

"Hello, Jack! What in thunder 's up?"

"After him, quick!" Jack answered huskily. "He 's nearly choked me to death!"

"Are you all right, lad?" Cap'n Crumbie lifted him to his feet.

"Yes, I think so, but—" Jack broke off to scramble out on deck and peer into the darkness.

The sound of oars could be heard not far away. There was another dory lying near, and into this the watchman and Jack hustled and pulled desperately after the retreating craft. It had a considerable lead, and in the black shadows of the wharves was not visible at first. Finally, though, "I can see him now," Jack cried. "Pull hard!"

The man in the other dory was evidently not an expert with the oars, for he was splashing badly as he urged his boat forward.

"We 've got him!" said Cap'n Crumbie. "He can't get away now!"

At that instant the splashing ceased, and the pursuers began to gain on their quarry more rapidly. They were overhauling the dory at top speed. Cap'n Crumbie stopped rowing.

"Easy there, lad!" he cautioned breathlessly. "Maybe that feller has a gun, and there 's no need for us to get shot."

Only a dozen yards of still water separated the two craft now, but there was no sound or movement in the other dory, and the pursuers were drifting nearer all the time.

"Why—why, it 's empty!" cried Jack, disgustedly, as the boat became more distinct.

Two or three more strokes brought them alongside. It was, as the boy had surmised, without an occupant—just an empty old dory, floating idly on the water.

"He must have gone over the side and swum ashore," said Jack, chagrined. "We should have had him in another few minutes. Let 's pull in closer to the wharves and see if there 's any sign of him there."

They searched accordingly, but without suc-

cess. Evidently the fugitive had slipped quietly into the water and escaped.

"Well, we 've got his dory, anyway," said Cap'n Crumbie. "Let 's go back for her."

They towed the craft back to Garnett and Sayer's wharf, where the watchman lighted a lantern and examined it.

"Huh! It 's Joe Whalen's dory," declared Cap'n Crumbie. "The old man 's been in bed with rheumatism for over a week, and he would n't hurt nobody, anyhow. This chap that attacked you must have swiped it. And there ain't a dog-gone thing in it, neither, 'ceptin' the oars. Knew too much to leave his things behind, he did."

"I 'm afraid I should n't have got off so well if I had n't thought of using a string to trip him up," said the boy. "He would have had me at his mercy in my bunk if I 'd been asleep. Why, what on earth—"

The lad stopped at the entrance of the sloop's cabin, the lantern in his hand illuminating the scene of the struggle. Then he stooped and picked up something that was lying on the floor,

half covered by the overturned table. It was beveled like a chisel at one end.

"That yours?" asked the watchman, puzzled.

"I 've never seen it in my life before," replied Jack. "It must have been dropped by that brute."

He weighed the bar in his hand, and passed it over to Cap'n Crumbie.

"I admit I was a bit scared," he said, "being awakened so suddenly that way and finding a man under my feet as soon as I jumped out, but I should have been a good deal more scared if I 'd known he had a thing like that in his hand!"

Cap'n Crumbie ran his fingers through his hair and sat down on the edge of one of the bunks.

"One good tap on the head with that thing, my lad, and you 'd ha' stopped running ferry-boats for all time," he said. "That bit o' string saved your life, I reckon."

"It looks like it," the boy admitted. "I wonder whether the Chief of Police will believe now that there 's something wrong or will wait un-

til I 'm in the hospital before he does anything!''

''Well, beat it up to the station-house now, and show them that piece of steel. I won't leave here till you come back. Whether it 's you or the sloop this mysterious feller is after, I don't know, but it ain't likely he 'll be around again to-night; and if he is he won't get the sloop so long 's I 'm alive.''

Jack slipped his shoes on and walked to the police station, where he found Sergeant Banks on night duty.

''What time will the chief be in?'' he asked.

''Eight o'clock,'' replied the sergeant. ''What 's wrong?''

For answer, Jack placed the bar of steel on the sergeant's desk.

''Somebody came into the cabin of my boat just now, while I was asleep, and left that when he went out.''

The sergeant frowned over the piece of steel and then eyed the boy.

''That 's a cold-chisel, I take it,'' he said finally. ''Where 'd you say you found it?''

Jack told his story briefly, ending with: "This was about half an hour ago, and you might catch the fellow if you send some of your men to look for him."

"Not so fast, young man," replied the sergeant, pompously. "Let me get this thing right, and then *I* 'll decide what action is necessary. First of all, you were in here the other day complaining of some one walking across your deck, were n't you?"

"He came into the cabin that time while my chum and I were asleep."

"Well, that 's all there is to that. He did n't hurt you, did he?"

"No, but he tried to strangle me, to-night. That 's something, is n't it?"

The officer elevated his eyebrows and puffed out his cheeks. Without a doubt he was incredulous.

"But just now you said he attacked you with this bar, did n't you?"

"No, I said he evidently meant to attack me with it," replied the boy, impatiently. "He must have dropped it when he fell over the

string. And then when Cap'n Crumbie heard me shouting, and answered, the man ran off without it."

"Then some one besides you saw the fellow, eh? That might make a difference, if it 's true."

"It was too dark for Cap'n Crumbie to see the man. He only heard me yelling."

"Well, what happened then?"

"Cap'n Crumbie and I jumped into the dory and chased the chap. He was in a dory of his own. We pulled after him as hard as we could, and I think we should have caught him if he had n't jumped overboard and swum to one of the wharves."

"And his dory disappeared too, eh?"

"No. We found it, but it was empty."

"Now that 's unfortunate," said the sergeant, sarcastically. "Seems like you 're the only person who saw this fellow and you did n't rightly see him, either—just heard him."

"I sort of think I *felt* him, too," replied Jack, warmly. "Look at my throat. Are n't the marks of the man's fingers there?"

"Ye-es, but I 've heard of folks having the nightmare and choking themselves."

"You think, then, that I just dreamed the whole thing?" exclaimed the boy. "Gee, that 's great! Maybe I dreamed that chisel thing there, too!"

"I don't *say* you dreamed. But you might have. I 'll give the story to the chief when he comes on in the morning, and—"

"And meanwhile the fellow can go home and get his wet clothes off and—"

"I 'll pass the word around," said the sergeant, "and we 'll keep a lookout, but I want to tell you that if we find that you 've been trying to put any funny business over, it 'll go hard with you. You 'd better come in and see the chief in the morning and let him hear your story."

Jack returned to the wharf and Cap'n Crumbie.

"Well, what did they say?" the watchman asked.

"I only saw Sergeant Banks, who was on night duty. He did n't seem to believe me, but

he 's going to pass the word round among his men, and I 'm to see the chief in the morning."

"Banks is a barnacle!" declared Cap'n Crumbie. "*I* 'll go with you next time, and we 'll see if we can't get 'em to take a bit o' notice."

There was no more sleep for Jack that night. The watchman kept him company until dawn, and the boy went home as usual for an early breakfast, after which he and Cap'n Crumbie repaired to the police station.

" 'Morning," greeted the chief. "Glad to see you, Cap'n. Now, what 's your version of this business?"

The chief's manner was much too airy for Cap'n Crumbie, and he scowled as he advanced to the desk. He grunted as he thrust his hands into his pockets and faced the man behind it.

"My version 's the same as his, chief," he replied. "I s'pose you 've got the feller by this time, ain't you?"

"Why, no," he said. "We have n't made any arrest yet. There is n't much to go on,

Cap'n. We watched along the wharves last night, but did n't see any one."

"Guess the feller was home and abed before your men started to look for him," grunted the Cap'n. " 'T aint likely he 'd stand around and wait to be caught, is it? 'Course, if he had n't been in the water he might, but being sort o' wet—" Cap'n Crumbie's labored sarcasm ended in a derisive snort.

"Come, now, Crumbie, let 's get this thing straight. I understand that you didn't actually see the man. That 's so, is n't it?"

"Yes, that 's so, but—"

"But you 're sure there was somebody there, are you?"

"Sure? 'Course I m sure! Did n't I nearly pull my arms off going after him in the dory?"

"H-m, yes, I dare say. Well, I 'll put a man on the wharf for the next few nights and maybe we 'll catch the fellow at it again. How 'll that do?"

"Well, that 'll help," admitted the Cap'n, more calmly. "But, all the same, it ain't much

use locking the stable door when the cat 's out o' the bag!" And he and Jack departed, taking what satisfaction they might from their visit.

During the course of the morning Martin and his friend Regan came down to the wharf, and Jack eyed the pair suspiciously.

"Ferry doing good business, huh?" Martin enquired, cordially.

"Quite, thanks," replied Jack, with his eyes glued on a patch on Martin's trouser leg. He was sure now that the man had worn a different suit on the day following the visit of the midnight intruder on the *Sea-Lark*. Unfortunately the scrap of cloth left on the nail was far too small to serve as conclusive evidence, and for all Jack could affirm to the contrary the small patch on Martin's trousers might have been there for years.

CHAPTER XII

FIGHTING A GALE

THAT night a policeman was placed on Garnett and Sayer's wharf, in accordance with the chief's promise, and when Jack and his mate turned in, it was with easier minds. Mr. Holden, after hearing of the attack, endeavored to dissuade Jack from again sleeping on the sloop, but the boy pointed out that, with the regular watchman and a policeman on duty, there was small likelihood of further molestation. Mr. Holden at length agreed, and, as Jack anticipated, they were not disturbed. The captain awoke soon after four o'clock in the morning and, going up on deck, saw the watchman and police officer standing at the edge of the wharf, yarning.

"Well, you haven't had any more ghosts

prowling around, eh?'' the policeman laughed as he caught sight of the lad.

''No, and there are n't likely to be any if we keep tabs on them this way,'' replied the boy. ''Say, Cap'n Crumbie, I hear that the bluefish have been biting. Where 's the best place to get them?''

''You 're liable to get 'em anywheres outside the breakwater,'' the watchman replied. ''A chap came in with a big catch yesterday. He said he had to go a good ways out, though. You going fishing?''

''I 'd love to,'' replied Jack. ''And George wants to. I 've half a mind to slip out for an hour or two before it 's time to begin running the ferry.''

''Don't go too far,'' warned Cap'n Crumbie, craning his neck as he stared upward at the sky. ''It 's all right at present, but I should n't be surprised if it came on to blow a mite harder.''

''There 's no wind now, to speak of,'' said Jack.

''Not down here,'' replied the watchman.

"But look at them clouds a mile or so up. 'T ain't blowing hard, even there, but I 'm just telling you to keep your eyes open; see?"

"All right, Cap'n, thanks," said Jack. Then he climbed up on the wharf and went off in search of bait. Ten minutes later he returned and aroused his chum.

"All hands on deck!" he cried, popping his head through the companionway door. "Come on, George. I 've got the bait. Let 's go get 'em!"

The mate needed no second invitation. In less than sixty seconds he was hauling on the mainsail halyards, and soon the sloop was standing down the harbor, a picture of grace as she glided through the smooth water. There was a gentle northwesterly breeze which gave a bare ripple to the surface and sent the sloop along like some beautiful lazy bird with the red hue of dawn staining its wings. Both boys were looking forward enthusiastically to this treat, which they had promised themselves for some time. As soon as they reached the open sea a hand-line with a good heavy lead was dropped

astern, and while Jack stood at the helm George squatted on the deck, facing the trailing wake, in which the bait danced sixty feet astern.

"Yell out the second you get a strike, and I 'll luff," said Jack, with one eye on the sails and another on the intent figure of his chum.

"Aye, aye," replied George, his face set with grim determination; for fishing, and especially bluefishing, was the particular joy of his life.

Straight to the south they ran, for a couple of miles, without getting a bite. Then Jack headed in the direction of Four Fathom Shoal, with similar results. Round came the sloop once more, the captain taking her over all the most likely fishing-grounds, and both the lads were beginning to think that the fish among which the Greenport man had had such excellent sport the previous day must be miles away by now.

"Luff!" George cried unexpectedly, at the top of his voice, as, with both hands, he steadied the trailing line.

Up into the wind came the *Sea-Lark,* shaking her sails as though indignant at being thus

checked in the midst of her career, and George, with his teeth clenched, hung on but was unable to draw in a foot of line.

"What is it? A whale?" Jack exclaimed with delight, watching the straining line.

"No. A sardine!" replied George, jerkily, his eyes aflame with excitement. "Get that boat-hook ready. We 'll need a crane to lift this fellow out of the water."

"Don't hurry him!" Jack urged as his chum began impatiently to try to haul in.

Suddenly the line began to slip through George's wet hands. The gamy fish had made a prodigious rush, but its captor soon managed to check the runaway, and then the real battle began. Foot by foot the mate drew his prey toward him, and foot by foot the prey contested the struggle, until its strength gave out. Then, for a while, as George brought the line in more quickly, he half feared the fish must have got off the hook. He had hauled it within four or five yards of the sloop when the captive began to show fight afresh, and made a mad dash down into the depths. There was less "punch"

in it now, however, and the final effort did not last long. Soon its bright silvery belly showed clearly in the water as George drew it nearer. Jack leaned over the side with the boat-hook, ready to hoist it by the gills.

"It 's a pretty good size—for a sardine," he commented dryly. "Keep that line tight, chump! There!"

The boat-hook was firmly caught in the fish's gills, and with a comical expression of wonderment the mate saw his prize drawn inboard.

"Why—why, it *is* a bluefish, I suppose?" he said, surveying the beautiful creature now flopping about in the bottom of the cockpit. "I 've never seen one quite so big as that."

"It 's twelve or thirteen pounds of bluefish, all in one piece," replied Jack, admiringly. "They don't run to that size very often round about here. You 're a hero! I don't believe that when Cap'n Crumbie starts stuffing the summer visitors with his yarns he ever pretends to have hauled in a bluefish any larger than that. Bait up, and have another go."

But George's catch had evidently been a soli-

tary straggler, or the shoal had gone off the feed, for though the sloop sailed to and fro for three quarters of an hour longer, the bait danced astern unmolested.

"Let 's try for cod," Jack suggested at length, when it became apparent that they were wasting their time. Away went the anchor, in fifteen fathoms of water, and the lads dangled hook and line over the side patiently for another fifteen minutes.

"Mr. Codfish is n't at home, either," Jack declared, beginning to wind up his line. "We 'll try a little farther off. Up with the mud-hook, George."

Half a mile farther to the south they again tried, and not even a sculpin rewarded their efforts. Jack looked up at the blue sky and glanced further out to sea.

"We 'll have one more shot at it," he said. "The weather is holding good. I 'm going to tempt 'em off Knife Rock."

Again the sloop glided away from the land. The buildings on the Point became a blur. The squat stone lighthouse stuck up less plainly.

"This is somewhere about the right spot," Jack said at length. "If we don't make a haul inside half an hour or so, though, we shall have to go, because it 's a good way from here to the harbor, and we shall have to beat our way back."

Two minutes later he gave a movement of the wrist, and his face lighted up.

"Bite?" George inquired.

"Yes, the right kind, too," replied the captain. "I 'd be very much surprised if that was n't a—"

Again he gave a deft movement of the wrist, and then began to draw up the line. A fish was on, fighting gamely, but, cod-like, its fight was brief. Jack estimated as he hauled it aboard that it weighed four pounds.

"It 's a baby compared with your bluefish," he admitted, baiting up afresh, "but if we 're going to get sport like this, I 'll hate to leave it."

Almost immediately afterward both boys hooked fish at the same time, and the prospect of the eight-o'clock ferry-boat leaving Garnett

and Sayer's wharf promptly on time began to look less certain. The minutes slipped by quickly, and several more captures were made. Then there came a pause. Jack was on the point of drawing in his line and making ready for the return run, when a sharp tug drew all his attention, and during the next quarter of an hour the fish were biting greedily. So preoccupied was the captain that he did not notice at first that the gentle breeze, before which they had run out from the harbor, had freshened considerably.

"We 'd better call it a day!" he said at length, reluctantly. "Cap'n Crumbie was right when he said there was going to be more wind. Lend a hand here with the anchor, quickly!"

An angry little squall swept over the surface while the boys were tugging at the cable.

"What 's the matter with the thing!" Jack exclaimed, as the anchor refused to come up.

"It 's stuck in the sand," George said. "Give it time."

But, though the lads strained to the utmost, the anchor refused to budge.

"Here 's a nice fix!" said Jack, after a while, resting from his exertions. "Do you know what I believe?"

George shook his head dismally.

"I believe we 've been fishing right over the place where that schooner went down last winter. Anyway, the anchor has caught fast on something, and we sha'n't see it again till the ocean runs dry."

"What are you going to do? Cut it adrift?"

"Nothing else to do. Is n't it a pity! Let 's have one more good haul first."

All this time the wind was rapidly gaining force. The boys spent full twenty minutes, in all, struggling to release their anchor from the bottom of the sea, and then the skipper drew out his knife and hacked the manila rope through. The end disappeared over the side with a splash just as a fresh squall burst upon the sloop.

"Whew! That 's fierce!" exclaimed the elder boy. "She 'll need to be close-reefed for the job."

More precious minutes were wasted while

the reef-points were being tied. By the time the mainsail could be hauled half a gale was blowing; and though they were but a few miles from shore, the sea was rising ominously. The wind had swung round a little more to the north, making the task of beating back to Greenport more difficult. Hoping that he might fall in with a friendly tow, Jack looked around anxiously for some fishing-vessel bound on the same journey, but as luck would have it, there was nothing in sight. This gave the boy no serious concern for a while as he bore away on the starboard tack, heading about northwest toward the shore, but before long he found the sloop needed delicate handling to avoid being capsized in the squalls, which now came in rapid succession. Even with only two thirds of her usual spread of canvas, the *Sea-Lark* listed over dangerously under the pressure of the wind, her lee rail often being under water while her bow was pounded continually by the rising sea. The worst, however, Jack knew still lay ahead, for he must soon go about and make a wide sweep to the northeast, this taking them

farther out to sea, where a much rougher time had to be anticipated. He consulted George on the problem.

"We can either turn 'round and run down the coast to Penley," he said, "or we can take a chance and try to work our way back to the harbor. What do you think? It 's pretty rough, and as soon as we find ourselves out there we shall get a drenching, for certain."

"Well, she 'll make it," replied George, pluckily, though he was wet through with spume already, and this was his first experience of such weather out in the open sea. "We don't want to funk it now, surely."

"That 's what I think," replied the captain; "only if you 'd rather, I 'm willing to make for Penley."

"I 'm game to try for Greenport, if you are," the younger boy declared.

"All right. Here goes!" And the plunging sloop swung on the port tack, heading northeast and out to the open sea. She struggled along for fifteen minutes or so, but it then became apparent that all was not going well. To

carry more sail was an impossibility, and the sloop's maneuvers were not taking her a foot nearer harbor against wind and sea. Though awkward, the position was not alarming, for it was still possible to swing on the starboard tack again and reach the lee of the land away to the southwest of Greenport, where they would have to remain until the gale eased.

"It 's no good," Jack declared. "Guess it 'll have to be Penley, after all. I 'm getting hungry, are n't you?"

"Don't mention breakfast to me," protested George. "I could eat the side of a house!"

As Jack put the helm over, the canvas flapped and slashed madly, and then, as the sails bellied, a terrific gust of wind swept down on the *Sea-Lark*. Before Jack had time to ease her up into the wind again she listed far over, the wind screaming in her halyards while a smother of spume weltered over her deck. It seemed that something must give way under the strain, and in the midst of the confusion the eye-bolt pulled out of the mast. Down fell the peak, and to his

alarm Jack found the mainsail out of commission at the very moment when it was most needed.

Leaving the wheel to take care of itself—for the boat was no longer under control—he sprang forward to help George in the task of getting the useless sail down and stowing the jib, and as the sloop fell away into the trough of the sea, trouble of a very real nature began to overwhelm her. A solid green wave slapped the side and slopped inboard, filling the cockpit and nearly washing both captain and mate off their feet. Away poured the water through the scuppers, but, although the companionway door was closed, much of the sea leaked down into the cabin, and by the time the lads had furled the sails their attention was badly needed at the pump. Jack jumped into the cockpit and worked away at the crank furiously, while the sloop drifted along under bare poles, utterly at the mercy of every wave which came her way. At times she dug her nose deep down into the center of a rearing sea and fell away from it crazily, broaching to, only to be

half swamped by the succeeding wave. Away were swept all the fish the lads had caught. Time after time the cockpit was full of water, and there was nothing Jack could do to prevent it leaking down into the cabin. So long as the pump did not choke he hoped to be able to keep her afloat unless she turned over, but the danger of the latter was now increasing every minute, for the gale was gaining strength and the sloop was drifting farther from the lee of the land all the time. Before long the breakwater, the houses on the Point, and even the lighthouse had dipped below the horizon, and the *Sea-Lark* was the center of an angry circle of foam-flecked water, bounded on every point of the compass by the sky-line only.

"We 're in for it, for fair, now," said Jack, standing by his chum's side in the little cockpit and recovering his breath while George took a hand at the pump. "And there is n't a blessed sail in sight. Now see what 's coming, just to cheer us up a bit."

The first heavy drops of a pelting storm splashed down on deck, and soon the boys had

not only the spray from the sea but also rain slashing their faces whenever they turned to windward.

"I don't think I 'll play at this any longer," said George, glancing up at his chum with a humorous grimace as he toiled away at the pump. "Let 's go home."

He did not realize quite as well as Jack did how serious was their plight. With anchor gone, sails useless, and a storm driving them away from shelter, to say nothing of the half-swamped condition of their vessel, there was a distinct possibility that neither of them would ever get home again. Though Jack did not show it, he was beginning to feel that their chances were decidedly slender.

"Let me have another go at that pump," he said, as the sloop recovered somewhat awkwardly from the swirl of a white-capped wave. "Maybe the wind will go down soon, and then we shall manage somehow, but we 've got to keep busy with the pump." Little though he liked to think so, he felt sure the sluggish movements of the *Sea-Lark* were due to her having

shipped too much water. His hands were becoming blistered with the task, and his arms ached, but there was no alternative to struggling on. Any moment there might appear the brown sail of a fishing-vessel, and it was this thought which buoyed him up even when things looked blackest. Several hours, however, drifted on before his restless eyes rested on a speck on the horizon and a cry of thankfulness burst from him.

"Oh, gee! there 's a schooner or something!" he shouted, pointing across the wind-swept ocean, away to the east. "If she 's bound for Greenport she will have to cut in close to us when she tacks."

Their spirits rose high. The speck in the distance steadily increased, until the boys felt certain they must be sighted.

"Just in time, too!" George exclaimed. "They 'll be getting kind of anxious about us at home by now, I fancy."

Suddenly, however, the boys' hopes were destroyed. The far-off schooner went about and before long was hull down once more. This

came as a terrible disappointment to Jack and his chum, for there seemed little likelihood of the gale subsiding before night. And, unpleasant though their position was in the daytime, it would be infinitely worse in the darkness. Though the rain stopped, the force of the wind did not diminish. Jack's nerve became just a trifle shaky for the first time when he knew that the daylight was actually failing. The boys were both exhausted with continual pumping; and though, with such real danger staring them in the face they gave little thought to the subject of food, the long fast was beginning to tell on them. George's face was haggard, and the captain would not have allowed him to take more than an occasional brief trick at the pump, but there was no alternative to both lads sharing the work. Their hands were raw, and every muscle in their bodies seemed to be crying aloud in protest.

"We 'll stick it as long as we can," said Jack, laboring painfully at the pump as darkness enveloped the stricken sloop. "We 've drifted miles and miles away from Greenport by now,

but there 's always a chance, so long as we keep afloat."

"I don't believe the wind is blowing quite so hard," replied George, who felt decidedly limp, and clung to the side of the cockpit while the other lad worked with waning strength.

"It seems to be easing off a bit," replied Jack, encouragingly, though he saw not the remotest sign of any such thing happening. "Anyway, I 'd rather keep on pumping for the present than swim, would n't you?"

The seas were running mountain-high, their curling crescents frequently falling inboard with an alarming swish. A great wave, rushing through the blackness, towered high near them for an instant, as though contemplating its prey hungrily. Then it came on, while the *Sea-Lark* lay broadside to. There was a roar of rushing waters. Jack gave a warning cry, and then both the lads were gasping for breath under the torrent. A smother of sea and foam swept about over them, filling the cockpit, and pouring over the other side of the deck. Jack felt that this must be the finish.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SIMON P. BARKER GOES OUT

AN hour after the two boys left Garnett and Sayer's wharf in the *Sea-Lark,* to go fishing, Cap'n Crumbie went into town. It was, for him, a momentous occasion, for he intended to have his hair cut. On the way he met a crony and chatted for twenty minutes. Then, at the barber's shop, he had to wait half an hour for a chair. Also, the Cap'n had a shave, and when, finally, he might have taken his departure, he met another crony, and there was an interminable argument on the question of fishermen's wages. So that, by the time the guardian of Garnett and Sayer's wharf took it into his head to stroll back to his accustomed haunts, a distinct change had taken place in the weather. The wind was singing in the rigging of the various craft around the wharves.

There were low clouds scudding across the sky, with their hint of a coming storm.

Cap'n Crumbie thrust his hands into his pockets as soon as he reached the edge of the wharf, and cast a professional glance round the harbor, up at the sky, and far out to sea beyond Gull Island.

"I thought this was coming!" he muttered. "Ain't that corn on my foot been aching cruel enough?" Cap'n Crumbie never breathed to a living soul the source of his remarkable weather prophecies, but that corn had served him faithfully, if irritatingly, for years.

Suddenly he spun around and shot a glance across in the direction of the Point, remembering that the *Sea-Lark* had gone out beyond the breakwater. He was wondering whether or not she had returned.

"By Jiminy, they 're out yet!" he spluttered, showing distinct signs of perturbation, and screwing up his weather-beaten face as he peered out beyond Gull Island. He could see nothing of the little sloop, however, and took several sharp turns, first nor'east and then

so'west, on his regular beat. But his movements were not so slow and measured as usual. There was agitation written all over him. Each time he turned he gazed out to sea afresh, and each time, seeing nothing of the sloop, he grunted.

"By Jiminy!" he exclaimed again, after a while; and then, as a sharp gust of wind almost lifted his cap off his head, "By *Jiminy!*"

As a matter of fact, Cap'n Crumbie was very seriously upset. He had every faith in the lads' ability to handle their craft, even if something more than a capful of wind came along, provided it was not too squally. But there was the distinct promise, now, of something more than mere squalls. And if Jack was far out he would have a hard fight to beat his way back against this wind.

Cap'n Crumbie stumped his way to and fro for another five minutes and then, snorting impatiently, walked along the wharf to Messrs. Garnett and Sayer's office. There he picked up the telephone receiver and spoke to the man on duty at the light on the Point.

"This is Cap'n Crumbie," he said. "Who 's that? . . . Joe? 'Morning, Joe. . . . I just rung you up to ask if you can see anything o' the ferry-boat. Them two kids went out fishing in her early. . . . Saw them go, eh? Well, ain't they on their way back?" There was a pause, while the watchman listened irritably to the voice over the wire. Then, "All right, Joe. Ring us up at the office, will you, as soon as you sight 'em?"

The man at the light had reported that there was nothing afloat as far as he could see. With growing impatience the watchman returned to the end of the wharf, where he now found Martin and Hegan.

"I don't see the sloop around," observed Hegan, casually.

"No, an', dog-gone it, maybe you never will!" snapped Cap'n Crumbie. "It 's miles away, out to sea," he went on, waving his arm vaguely over toward the ocean. "If those two kids don't get drownded it 'll be a wonder."

"They 're in the sloop?" asked Martin, with peculiar concern.

"Aye, fishing, and been blown to anywhere by now."

Then he stopped suddenly, his eyes having alighted on the tug *Simon P. Barker,* which lay alongside the adjoining wharf, with smoke emerging from her stack. The *Simon P. Barker* was the only tug in Greenport. Cap'n Crumbie cordially disliked Mr. Barker. In fact, he would have done almost anything in the wide world rather than ask Mr. Barker to do him a favor. But personal likes and dislikes had to be sunk, in such an emergency as this. The watchman stood, running his hand through his stubbly beard for a minute, and then stumped off toward the little office.

"Well!" the ship-owner demanded, looking up as Cap'n Crumbie entered. He was not in a particularly pleasant frame of mind this morning.

"Guess young Holden and the other lad must be in trouble," said the Cap'n gruffly. "They 've gone out fishing, and maybe they 'll have difficulty getting back."

"Well, what about it?" asked the shipowner.

"The tug ain't doing anything. Can't you send it out after 'em?"

Mr. Barker put down the pen with which he had been writing, and stared at the watchman in frank astonishment.

"Say, what d' you take me for? A nursemaid?" he demanded when the power of speech returned.

Cap'n Crumbie swallowed his anger, swallowed his pride, and swallowed his desire to tell Barker just what he did take him for.

"P'raps you haven't noticed," said the watchman, "there 's quite a bit of a gale coming up. You don't want them two lads—"

"Get out of here! I 'm busy," snapped Mr. Barker, rudely. And Cap'n Crumbie had no choice but to retire. His face, however, was full of wrath. He could have taken the shipowner in his gnarled hands and half shaken the life out of him; only that would not have helped matters any.

"Ain't there some way of sending off help to those kids?" Martin asked when the watchman returned.

"Aye, there would be," retorted Cap'n Crumbie, boiling over with rage, "if some people had as much feelin' as a cockroach. That man Barker—" He shook his fist at the little office in which the ship-owner was writing.

"What 's Barker got to do with it?" Hegan asked.

"That 's his tug," said the Cap'n, bitterly. "I just been across and told him about the sloop, and he 's too dratted mean to send her out."

Martin and Hegan exchanged glances.

"But surely we ain't going to let the poor lads *drown!*" Hegan protested.

"Well, maybe they won't drown," the watchman replied. "I guess if it got much worse the old skinflint would send the tug off, but it 's rough enough out there now. 'T would n't surprise me to hear they 'd capsized the sloop."

Hegan was biting his thumb reflectively.

"What does Barker charge to fetch a schooner in when there ain't enough wind for her?" he asked at length.

"Oh, about twenty-five dollars," answered the watchman.

"Well, could n't we raise twenty-five dollars somehow?" Hegan asked. "I 'll chip in, and glad to. Martin will, too, huh?"

"Sure!" replied Martin.

Just as Cap'n Crumbie stuffed his hand into a breast pocket and fetched out one or two small bills, Tony Santo appeared on the wharf.

"Where 's that boy of mine, Cap'n?" he called out as he approached. "He never came home for breakfast."

"You 're the very man I want," said the Cap'n, brightening. "We 've got to get that tug out, quick. The lads went fishing hours ago, and I guess they can't get back against this wind. I went to ask Barker about it just now, and he as good as told me to go and hang myself."

"Why?" asked Tony, astonished.

"Because he ain't giving nothing away, if he can help it. It 's money he 's after, every time and all the time. We were just getting up a subscription."

"Don't worry about that," said Tony, in a businesslike manner. "I 'll hire the tug."

Two minutes later Tony was in the ship-owner's office, demanding that the *Simon P. Barker* should put to sea without any delay, in search of the *Sea-Lark*.

"It 's all very well you talking to me like that," said Mr. Barker, "but you must remember I don't come down to your place and order you about. A thing of this kind is a matter of business with me. I can't interrupt my men in what they 're doing and send my tug out to sea every time a couple of lads get skylarking in a boat."

"I 'm not asking you any favor," said Tony, coldly. "All I do ask you is to hustle. I will make myself responsible for your bill."

"Well, now you 're talking!" exclaimed the ship-owner. "If you 're prepared to hire the tug, that 's exactly what she 's there for. Where d' you want her to go?"

Tony was already gently urging Mr. Barker out of his office toward the tug.

"A few miles beyond the breakwater, to be-

gin with," Tony replied. "If we can't see them, we shall have to cruise around till we pick them up."

"Thirty dollars is what it will cost you," Mr. Barker declared. "And, see here," he added, "if I fetch them youngsters in I don't want to hear any more o' that nonsense about salvage money for bringing in the *Grace and Ella*. They 've been to a lawyer about it, and he 's pestering me for five hundred dollars and threatening suit. If my tug gives their sloop a tow back now, I shall reckon we 're quits, understand? But if the tug don't pick 'em up, it 'll cost you thirty dollars; see?"

"Yes, yes," said Tony, willing to agree to almost anything, reasonable or unreasonable, so long as the *Simon P. Barker* put off without further delay.

Mr. Barker instructed Burke, the tug's skipper, to consider himself under Tony's orders. Tony slipped on board, with Cap'n Crumbie at his heels, and the moorings were cast off.

"Glad you 're coming along, Cap'n," said Tony. "Another pair of eyes may be useful."

"By gravy!" the watchman exclaimed, "I 'd ha' been *rowing* out soon, if I could n't ha' found any other way o' getting there!"

Rain had begun to fall by the time the tug got beyond the breakwater. Burke steered in the direction of Knife Rock buoy, where by now even the tug felt the choppiness of the sea. Nothing could be seen of the sloop, however.

"Maybe they 've run for shelter to some place down the coast," Tony suggested.

"That 's likely what they would do, if they could n't make Greenport," Cap'n Crumbie agreed, little dreaming that at that moment the *Sea-Lark* was helpless and drifting aimlessly, almost half a dozen miles away to the south.

The tug turned westward, and for several miles the shore was scanned closely from a distance, without success. With a heavy heart Tony at last gave Burke word to return to the harbor. It was always possible, he reflected, that word had been received from some point along the coast that the sloop had gone ashore there, or been picked up by a

schooner. Further search in the tug, at any rate, was useless.

"Oh, they 'll turn up all right," said Cap'n Crumbie, as the tug puffed her way fussily back to her own moorings. He was, however, by no means certain that he would ever see the lads again.

Jack's father, having by now heard what had happened, was on the wharf awaiting the return of the tug. Mr. Holden shook his head gravely as Tony and Cap'n Crumbie stepped ashore.

"It looks bad, very bad, to me," he said in a helpless fashion, addressing Tony. "They must have been blown right out to sea."

"I hope not, at any rate, Sam," replied the boat-builder. "All I know is that those two boys understand how to manage their sloop, and they 've both got plain horse-sense. It 's no use trying to guess what 's happened to them, but you can be sure that they did their best. I 'll believe they 've been drowned when we find the *Sea-Lark* smashed up somewhere on the rocks, and not until then."

The news quickly spread through the town that the sloop was missing, and the fact was duly chronicled that evening in the "Greenport Gazette." The reporter who had written the account had few enough facts to go upon, for there were none except the bare statement that the *Sea-Lark* had put off on a fishing-trip and failed to return. But that did not deter the reporter from writing half a column, in which he told the story of how the *Sea-Lark* had come into Jack's possession, how the boy had started the ferry and actually made money with it, and how sincere was the wish expressed by everybody that Jack Holden and George Santo would soon be back plying to and fro on their regular "trade" in the harbor. A photograph of Jack and also one of his mate appeared on the front page, together with a snap-shot of the sloop which some one had taken in the summer as she lay at the hotel landing on the Point. Altogether, the boys occupied the post of honor in the "Greenport Gazette" that evening, even though it was a somewhat dismal honor. To fill up his half-column the reporter had written

glowingly of the courtesy and intelligence of the ferryman and his assistant, and he also printed a curiously inaccurate interview with Cap'n Crumbie on the subject; inaccurate because Cap'n Crumbie, far too worried by the lads' disappearance to bother about being interviewed, had merely glared at the man with a note-book and consigned him to oblivion.

One or two of the more venturesome Greenport skippers, including Bob Sennet, who never stayed in harbor on account of bad weather if it was humanly possible to get to the fishing-grounds, put off to sea, keeping a sharp lookout for any sign of the *Sea-Lark.* Captain Jordan, of the *Grace and Ella,* even went a dozen or more miles out of his way in the hope of being able to rescue the boys, but though the lads actually saw the sails of the schooner in the distance, and had high hope of being rescued until the *Grace and Ella* went about and disappeared, the sloop was not seen by any of the fishermen.

Meanwhile even Tony was becoming terribly depressed. He had at first resolutely declined

to admit even to himself the possibility that his son had been lost at sea, but as the day wore on without word he began to have grave doubts.

The first intelligence Mr. Farnham received that anything was wrong was when he picked up the paper that evening and his eyes alighted on the picture of the sloop.

"By Jove! Rodney, the *Sea-Lark 's* been blown out to sea!" he said.

Rodney, who, not having seen anything of the sloop all day, had imagined it had stopped running on account of the storm, threw down the book he was reading and hastened to his father's side. Together they read the printed account of the affair. A few minutes later they were speeding toward the town, in an automobile. Cap'n Crumbie, Tony, and Mr. Holden were standing disconsolately at the end of the wharf as the car approached.

"Any news of the boys yet?" Mr. Farnham asked.

The watchman shook his head.

"Has the tug been off searching for them?"

"I went off in her myself," said Tony.

Mr. Farnham looked from Tony to Mr. Holden, and read in their faces the suspense they were enduring.

"Let 's go off in the tug again, Dad," Rodney urged.

"It can be hired, I suppose?" Mr. Farnham asked.

"Sure!" replied Cap'n Crumbie. "Barker 'd be tickled to death."

"Then please go and tell him to hold it at my disposal until darkness sets in. We 'll be on board in a little while. Mr. Santo, I want you to let me help you out in any way I can. I owe it to my boy's friends, you know."

"That 's all right, Mr. Farnham," replied Tony. "But there is n't much we can do, except, as you say, go off in the tug again."

"If the boys could n't make Greenport, is n't it likely that they 'd turn and run somewhere down the coast?"

"They might, of course. But if they 'd done that we ought to have got word by now. They ought to have run into Penley, by rights. I 've telephoned down there twice, and if anything

should be heard of the sloop there I 'll get word over the wire immediately."

"Well, what 's the next place south of Penley? There is n't any port for miles, is there?"

"Nowhere that the *Sea-Lark* could put in, until you come to Bristow, and they would n't have to go as far as that for shelter."

"Bristow, eh? That 's about forty miles off. Too far, is n't it? Anyway, I 'll telegraph to the authorities there and at the other places up and down the coast, so that if any news is heard we shall be advised."

Mr. Farnham drove off to attend to this matter, and immediately on his return the *Simon P. Barker* put off to sea once more, Tony joining Rodney and his father on board. The tug traveled south almost as far as Penley, and then, bearing off to the east, zigzagged her course northward again. Two incoming schooners were sighted, and Mr. Farnham ordered Burke to head these off, but in neither case had the men on the vessel seen anything of the sloop.

"It 's been blowing hard all day," said one

weather-beaten skipper in reply to their inquiry. "An' if the sloop ain't been picked up, an' it ain't run into Penley, it 's long odds she 's been swamped afore now."

Not until darkness made it difficult to pursue their search further did those on the tug return to Greenport, by which time a crowd of anxious watchers had assembled on the wharf, hoping against hope that the *Simon P. Barker* might bring in the eagerly anticipated news. Neither Tony nor Mr. Holden slept a wink that night, for there was always a chance that some vessel might come towing the *Sea-Lark* back to port.

CHAPTER XIV

CASTAWAYS

AS the wild swirl of water rushed over Jack, he clung desperately to the handle of the sloop's pump. The vessel staggered under her load, but righted herself bravely.

"Are you there?" the boy spluttered, as soon as he could breathe once more. It was too dark to see anything.

"I—I think so," came back the mate's voice. "I didn't expect to be, though. We don't want much more of that stuff!"

The hours dragged along with leaden heels. Twice again during the night the sloop almost foundered beneath a terrible blow, but each time managed to right herself. It seemed to the distressed lads almost a week of darkness must have passed before a faint blur of light appeared in the eastern sky. When dawn be-

gan to approach Jack had arrived at that state of physical exhaustion when further effort was almost intolerable, but the sight of returning daylight, with the possibilities it brought of being sighted, filled him anew with life. Then, a little later, his eyes opened wide with blank surprise.

"Why—why, where *are* we?" he exclaimed.

The boys stared into the half-gloom away to the west. The roar of surf was distinct above the rushing wind, and as the light increased it was possible for the lads to make out a line of broken water less than half a mile away.

"That is n't the mainland," George declared presently. "It 's only a little bit of a place. It surely can't be Lobster Island! That 's forty miles or more away from Greenport."

"Well, how far do you think we 've drifted in the last twenty hours or so?" asked the other. "I have n't the least notion where this place is, but I should n't be surprised if we had gone as far as Lobster Island. It 's a mercy we did n't bump up against it during the night. We 'd have been broken to splinters in that surf."

"I guess it *is* Lobster Island," said George. "There is n't any other place it could be. Does anybody live on it?"

"I don't believe so," replied the captain. "But even so, I 'm going to dump this packet on the shore."

"You can't, Jack, without wrecking her."

"Maybe, and maybe not. Anyway, it 's about the only chance I see sticking up at present. Wait till we drift more to leeward of the island; then I 'm going to make it or bust."

This sudden appearance of land was the most welcome sight Jack could have imagined, but there remained a good deal of deep water between them and it; and he was by no means certain that, in the sloop's badly crippled condition, she could be urged under the lee shore. Meanwhile, as the *Sea-Lark* drifted, the boy made ready to hoist the throat of the mainsail, and when the sloop was slowly going past he hauled up part of the jib.

The sloop shipped a heavy sea during this operation, and when the canvas bellied she was almost awash. But, on reaching the com-

paratively smooth water under the lee of the little island she became more tractable and by dint of delicate handling the boy was able to run her ashore on a sheltered, sandy beach.

The moment the keel grounded the two lads, dripping wet though they were—worn out with the hardest and longest spell of toil they had ever known, and hungry as hunters—looked at each other and laughed.

"Gee! but that was what I call a narrow squeak!" commented George. "If you 'd told me an hour ago that we should be safely ashore by now, I should have thought you 'd gone crazy."

"It did n't look much like it!"

"Have you cut yourself?" the mate asked, seeing something dark drop from his chum's hand.

"That 's nothing," replied Jack, dipping his hand over the side in the water. "Just a bit of a blister that burst. Let 's look at your hands. Mine *hurt,* I don't mind admitting, now."

George displayed the palms of his hands,

which were in no better condition than those of his friend.

Suddenly Jack sprang from his seat and, opening the door of the companionway, dived into the cabin. A moment later he emerged with a dry package of crackers and a bottle of water.

"You think I 've had my mind fixed on saving the sloop, all the night, don't you?" he asked, proffering the package to the mate, and stuffing a cracker into his own mouth. "But you 're wrong. I kept remembering those crackers, but we 'd both have been drowned as sure as eggs are eggs if we 'd opened that door and shipped a sea. This stuff has been in a locker for almost a week, and I 'd forgotten about it."

"If ever you see me turn up my nose at a cracker after this," said George, munching away, "I give you full permission to kick me from one end of Greenport to another."

"We 're not in Greenport yet," replied Jack. "Oh, my back 's nearly broken! I don't think I could have gone on pumping for another hour if my life had depended on it."

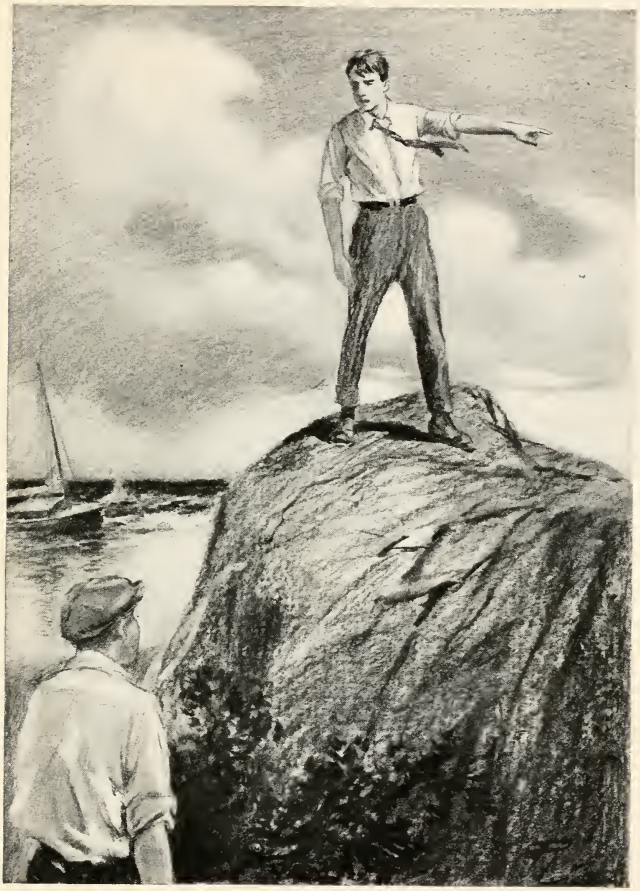
Though their position was dismal enough, stranded as they were on a barren beach, with their boat half full of water, the lads were now strangely happy. The strain of their recent unnerving experience had been greater than they realized, and now it was over, the sheer joy of being alive, and of knowing that death was not likely to overtake them any minute, was more than enough to compensate for the fact that they were still far from being out of the wood. The sloop was resting firmly enough on the sand, the receding tide leaving her high and dry. There remained a great deal of water to be pumped out of her bilge, but that could stay where it was for the present. No sign of any human habitation was visible on the island, but after resting a few minutes longer the boys went ashore and explored. They found nothing much to reward them. The island was little more than a barren rock, with sparse, coarse grass growing in places, and also a few low, straggling bushes. It was less than a thousand feet long, and only about two hundred feet across at its widest point. Possibly no human

foot had stepped ashore there for years. Still, it offered a secure haven, and on that account the boys were thankful enough. By eating very sparingly of their slender supply of crackers they would at least be able to keep alive for the present.

"I don't remember the geography of this part of the coast awfully well," said Jack, after they had made a cursory examination of the place, "but if this is Lobster Island it can't be so far off the mainland. The wind certainly is n't quite so strong now. I believe the worst of the gale is over. I 'm going to climb up to the top of that rock and see if I can spot the coast."

The rock in question was not easy to scale, as it offered no secure foothold, but its summit was a full twenty feet above the level of the ocean, and before long the captain of the *Sea-Lark* was perched precariously on the top.

"Hooray!" he cried, shouting down to his chum, and pointing away to the north-west. "We 're all right, George. I can see the coast plainly. And there are two ships in sight—



"We 're all right, George. I can see the coast plainly"

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schooners, I think. That must be Bristow harbor over there."

In his excitement he descended from his lofty perch a little too rapidly. Some distance from the bottom he slipped and came perilously near to breaking a bone or two as he rolled heavily to the spot where George stood. He barked his shins, and bruised one of his elbows, but was otherwise unhurt, and after rubbing the sore places for a few moments almost forgot about them, in view of the important discovery he had just made.

"If I can get that eye-bolt fixed in the top of the mast again," he said, "we 'll be away from here within the next few hours."

"There 's a biggish sea running," George cautioned, his eyes roving the tumbling surface.

"It is n't so bad," replied the skipper. "Why, hang it! the wind is n't half as strong as it was during the night. In another six hours or so we shall be able to slip across to Bristow in no time. You don't want another night of it, do you?"

"Go ahead," said George. "I 'm just crazy

about sailing in lovely weather like this. And the pump is the best part of it, too, is n't it? It seems years since I used a pump. Guess I must have forgotten how to work the thing by now. If I have forgotten, Jack, I hope you 'll do any little bit of pumping that might be necessary," he added with a laugh.

They had walked back to the *Sea-Lark,* and Jack was now standing on her deck, surveying the damage aloft. He soon realized that to replace the eye-bolt as it had been was a task beyond him, but, equipping himself with a few yards of spare manila rope, he climbed the mast and set about making temporary repairs. It had to be a clumsy job at best, but elegance was of less importance than strength; and before long he slipped down to the deck, convinced that the gear would hold.

"The tide will float us again in about another eight hours," he declared. "If it 's safe to make a start by then, we shall have two or three hours' daylight to make the run across."

Toward noon, when the ebb tide had ceased, and the water was coming in the direction of

the sloop once more, Jack fished the entire commissariat supply out of the locker again. It consisted of exactly five crackers and about half a pint of luke-warm water at the bottom of the bottle. The wind had by now dropped considerably, and there was every prospect of the lads being able to start on the journey to Bristow as soon as the *Sea-Lark* floated.

"Two crackers and a piece of one for you," said the captain, dividing them out equally. "After we 've eaten this we 've got to starve to death or eat sand. Gee! it 's funny how small a cracker is when you 've only got two and a half of them for dinner! If we 'd only thought to lash down that bluefish of yours!"

George, having eaten his share of the lunch, yawned. It was more than thirty hours since he had been asleep.

"It 'll be hours before the sloop 's afloat again," he said. "I 'm going to turn in and have a snooze."

He went into the cabin, and stretching in his bunk just as he was, fell asleep instantly.

Jack sat on the deck, with his back against the deck-house. He did not remember ever having been so sleepy and tired. Presently his head nodded. He raised it with a jerk and then lowered his chin to his chest once more, while leaden weights seemed to be dragging his eyelids down. Just a short nap, he reflected lazily, would make him feel much fresher. A moment later he, too, was sound asleep, and when he awoke a puzzled expression swept over his face. The water was lapping the side of the sloop. It must have been that which awoke him. He had been asleep for hours.

"Come on, George!" he shouted, leaping to his feet. "We 'll be afloat soon."

Rubbing his eyes, the mate emerged from the cabin.

"Why, the wind 's gone right down," he said. "That 's fine!"

The sloop, which had been canting over on her side while ashore, now lay almost on an even keel. Jack, armed with the boat-hook, and George with a pole which had been picked up from the beach in anticipation of this moment,

leaned over the side when the *Sea-Lark* began to rock slightly, and without much difficulty they got her afloat once more. Up went the mainsail and jib, and away the sloop ran, in the direction of the shore which Jack had observed from the top of the rock. In half an hour they raised land, and not long after that their craft was nuzzling one of the pile wharves in Bristow harbor.

"I 've got just a dollar and fifteen cents," said Jack, turning out his pockets. "How much have you?"

"A dime."

"We 'll manage all right. First of all we ought to telephone to Greenport. You 'd better speak to your mother."

They found a telephone booth near the harbor, and presently with Jack standing by his side, George was talking over the wire.

"Hello," he said. "Is that you, Mother? . . . We 're at Bristow. . . . No, we have n't got drowned yet. . . . Yes, we 're all right. You might tell Mr. Holden. . . . I 'm jolly hungry, that 's all. . . . Well, it *was* a bit rough

but you need n't have worried. . . . No, everything 's all right, really. . . . We 're going to sleep on the boat here to-night, and if the weather holds good we 'll sail back in the morning. . . . Yes, thanks, a dollar and a quarter between us, and we sha 'n't need any more. . . . In the *paper!* Our *pictures!* Oh, *crickey!* . . . All right, Mother. See you in the morning. G'by.

"Oh, splash!" he exclaimed, hanging up the receiver. "That 's done it! Jack, we 're dead and drowned and given up for lost, and in the 'Greenport Gazette' as corpses, and half the town 's almost in mourning for us already."

"Two eggs," Jack was saying, already hurrying his chum away by the arm; "no, three eggs, and bacon. Lots of bacon. And toast and butter. And coffee, and—"

"Stop it! you 're making my mouth water," protested George. "Here 's a place to get eats."

Two of the hungriest boys who had ever sat down in the restaurant were soon giving their orders and appealing to the waitress to hurry;

and it took every cent of their available cash to settle the bill.

After supper they strolled around the little town for an hour or two, and then returned to the sloop for a good night's rest.

"We ought to get some one to fix that gear for us properly before we start off," said Jack, when they had turned in. "It 's all right as it is if we don't strike any more bad weather, but we don't want another time like the last."

"We 'll find somebody to do it," replied George, sleepily, from his bunk; and a few moments later the two young adventurers were lost in slumber.

The next thing Jack knew, he was sitting bolt upright in bed. Footsteps on the deck had awakened him.

"George!" he said.

"Eh? Eh? What 's wrong?" asked the mate, in the darkness.

Already Jack was out of his bunk.

"There 's somebody prowling about," replied the skipper. "Listen! He 's in the cockpit now."

The cabin door opened, and Jack threw himself into a defensive attitude.

A light flared up in the doorway as a match was struck, and both boys burst into laughter.

"Well, you two!" said the familiar voice of Tony Santo.

"Dad!" George exclaimed. "How did you get here?"

"By train, of course," replied Tony. "I just thought I 'd run down and see that you were all right."

"It 's awfully good of you," said George. "But I told Mother there was nothing wrong."

"Oh, no! Nothing at all wrong!" replied Tony, sarcastically. "What happened?"

"Some of the gear gave way and we could n't use our sails," Jack explained.

"Well, my boys," said Tony, "I 'm glad it 's no worse. You certainly did throw a scare into us all, but it was n't your fault. Go back to bed now. There 's a hotel near here, and I 'll find a bed there. I 'll take you ashore for breakfast, and as soon as we get her overhauled we 'll be off for home."

Next morning Tony strengthened the temporary repairs which Jack had made, and, with the breeze still favorable, the *Sea-Lark* headed for Greenport while most of the good folk of Bristow were still in bed. The summer gale had vanished as quickly as it had come, and the sloop had an easy passage back.

CHAPTER XV

JACK LOSES COMMAND

JACK and his chum, on returning to Greenport, found themselves overwhelmed with congratulations. They were stopped on the street and plied with questions, and the reporter of the "Greenport Gazette" who had, two days before, firmly believed he was writing the boys' obituary notices, wrung their hands warmly in the hope of extracting a good "story." But neither the captain nor the mate of the *Sea-Lark* cared for publicity of this sort.

"You don't want to print anything more about us in your paper," said Jack. "Everybody knows we got back all right, and there 's nothing else to it."

More than that he refused to say to the journalist, but to Cap'n Crumbie he opened his heart, and the watchman nodded understand-

ingly as the boy recounted their adventures. The reporter, knowing there were more ways of killing a dog than by drowning it, awaited a favorable opportunity of tackling Cap'n Crumbie, and that worthy, without the slightest hesitation, told the reporter all he wanted to know. It was, therefore, with something of a shock that the boys found two columns of the local paper filled with a thrilling account of their narrow escape. Cap'n Crumbie, who at all times was inclined to make a little go a long way when he was telling a story, had polished up the high lights and introduced a few bright ideas of his own; and the reporter, who was none too particular about facts when it came to turning out exciting "copy," had let himself go. The combined result was a truly harrowing yarn, which made Jack and his friend roar with laughter, but which also had the effect of swelling the number of ferry patrons.

Mr. Farnham, who was a business man to his finger-tips, stood on the hotel landing with his wife, watching the *Sea-Lark* discharging an unusually large load, and he laughed softly.

"Sweet are the uses of advertisement!" he misquoted with a glance at his wife.

"You mean their adversity has proved an advertisement," replied Mrs. Farnham. "Yes, but I should be sorry if they had another advertisement of the same kind."

"Surely," replied the man of business, "but give Jack due credit. Lots of chaps would have taken a day or two off to rest, after going through all that. His hands were so sore at first that he could hardly hold the wheel. But instead of lying back and listening to congratulations, he got on the job while the rush lasted."

"He certainly has worked hard this summer."

"He has," replied Mr. Farnham, thoughtfully, "and fellows with as much grit as that are n't any too plenty. He ought to go a good long way in this world. But it won't be as a ferryman."

"It won't?"

"No"; and Mr. Farnham smiled. "I have a notion that by the time he gets through High School he 'll be the sort of chap I shall find

very useful in my office in New York. But there 's time enough to think about that.

"By the way," he said to Jack, stepping down on to the landing as soon as the last of the passengers had gone, "I have just got a new dinghy in place of the one I 've been using as a tender to the power-boat. I have no use for the old dinghy now, so if you 'd like to hitch it up behind the *Sea-Lark,* you can have it as a tender."

"Why—why," began Jack, who knew the dinghy well enough, and would have liked nothing better than to own her, but felt that Mr. Farnham had given him quite enough as it was, "that would be splendid, only—"

"Wait a minute," put in Mr. Farnham, quickly discerning what was in the lad's mind. "I 'm not going to make a gift of her to you, exactly. Let 's put the thing on a proper business footing, eh?"

Jack smiled. "I 'd be glad to," he said; "But how?"

"You can take her on condition that whenever I want to use your ferry during the rest of my

vacation this year, I 'm allowed to travel without paying my fare."

"But you hardly ever come across," protested Jack.

"Well, well, I 'll have to make a few special journeys to work off the price of the dinghy. Not another word, now. She 's yours. Rod will hand her over to you to-day."

"Thank you ever so much," Jack called after Mr. Farnham, who had already turned and was walking away toward his bungalow.

The proprietor of Holden's Ferry had but little time for gossip with his friend the watchman for several days after his return from Bristow, but early one morning, while Jack was preparing the sloop for the day's work, Cap'n Crumbie descended from the wharf and sat on the deck-house watching the lad use the swab.

"There 's one thing I forgot to tell you," said the watchman. "I 've got a notion that p'r'aps we 've been misjudging those two fellers Hegan and Martin."

"Misjudging them?"

"Well, I dunno," replied the Cap'n.

"P'r'aps it was only me that did the misjudging, but I surely did think it was either one or the other o' them that tried to brain you with a bar o' steel that night."

"Well?" said Jack, curiously.

"Well, 't ain't reasonable to think so now. If they 'd wanted to do you an injury they would n't have acted like they did when we all thought you was getting drownded out there."

Jack put down the swab.

"How do you mean?" he asked.

"I watched 'em, watched 'em close, too, when they heard you 'd been blown out to sea," said Cap'n Crumbie. "An' if I ever seed a case of genooine sorrow in a feller's face, it was then."

"Really!" said Jack, a little puzzled. He still had a painfully vivid memory of having been held down to the floor of the cabin by the throat and almost choked to death. "You can't always go much by looks, though."

"It was n't only their looks," said the Cap'n, shaking his head solemnly. "It was Hegan's idea to start a subscription to pay Barker for

the hire of his old tug to go and save you. And Martin offered to chip in, too. They meant it, all right. In another minute or two we 'd ha' been handing that shark Barker the thirty dollars he asked for before he 'd send the tug out. But just then Tony came along and paid Barker out of his own pocket."

"How funny!" said Jack, with a perplexed frown. "I 'm glad you told me. Next time they come along I must thank them for it. They were both down on the wharf yesterday, but I was pretty busy and they did n't speak."

"It just shows you," observed the watchman, "how you can be mistaken in folks."

"Ye-es," said Jack, a trifle doubtfully. Then, "Hello, here they come," he added.

Hegan and Martin strolled to the edge of the wharf and looked down on the deck of the *Sea-Lark.*

"Good morning," said Jack. "Cap'n Crumbie has been telling me about your being kind enough to start a subscription for the tug when we were blown out to sea. It was awfully kind of you."

"Subscription?" said Hegan. "Oh, yes, I 'd forgotten. That 's nothing. Forget it! You can't stand by and see a friend drown, can you?"

"I 'm glad it did n't cost you anything, after all," said Jack, lightly. "I don't mind admitting we should have been mighty glad to see that tug, and I 'm much obliged to you, all the same."

"Say, to-morrow 's Sunday. You don't run the ferry Sundays, do you?"

"No."

"I was just sayin' to my friend Martin that p'r'aps we might persuade you to take us for a sail. We 're both going back to New York to-morrow night, and I 'd like one good run in the sloop afore I go. What d' you say?"

"Why, I 'll be glad to," said the boy, graciously, feeling that was the least he could do to repay them for their generous offer of assistance. "As early as you like. What about seven o'clock?"

"Fine," replied Hegan. "We 'll be here."

As George had promised to visit some friends

with his mother next day, Jack arranged with Rod to accompany him on the trip in the sloop, promising to pick him up at the hotel landing as they sailed.

The men kept their appointment punctually enough. As a matter of fact, they arrived at the wharf immediately after Jack and George left the vessel to go home for breakfast; and, finding the cabin door locked, they asked Cap'n Crumbie where they could get the key.

"I guess Jack must have it," replied the Cap'n; and he remained there, chatting with them, until the skipper of the *Sea-Lark* returned.

Sailing across to the landing, they found Rod awaiting them, and then the sloop's bow was turned toward the sea.

"Now, which way do you want to go?" asked Jack. "The water is dead calm."

"How about a run down the coast as far as Penley?" Martin suggested, glancing sideways at Hegan.

"It 's all the same to me," replied Hegan, airily. "So long as I 'm afloat with a good

cigar in my mouth, it don't make any odds whether we go north, south, east, or west."

"All right," said Jack.

Soon after they got clear of the harbor and round the end of the breakwater, however, Hegan, for some unaccountable reason, changed his mind.

"Let 's run up the coast, as far as Indian Head," he said.

"I thought you did n't care where you were so long as you were afloat," replied Jack, laughing. "We might n't be able to get back if this bit of a breeze dropped, because of the tide."

"Oh, come on," said Hegan, with rough good humor. "Let's take a chance. I 'd like to see the coast around that way, and this wind ain't goin' to drop."

"Well, if you really want to," agreed Jack. "But don't blame me if you miss your train through not getting back on time."

"That 's all right," said Hegan. "I want to see Indian Head from the ocean. It 's years since I was off there. How far is it to Baymouth from the Head?"

The question was put with such curious intentness that Jack glanced at the man before replying.

"Thinking of swimming it?" he asked. "About a couple of miles as the crab walks."

"I thought it was about that," replied Hegan; and then he strolled forward to where Martin was leaning against the mast. The two men talked for some time in low voices, watching the coast-line as the sloop slid slowly past, but neither Jack nor Rodney took much notice of them. Presently, however, Hegan turned round and shouted aft to the captain.

"Could n't you keep her a bit farther out?" he asked casually. "We don't want to hug the shore all the way up."

Jack waved a hand in reply, and gave a slight turn to the wheel, in response to which the *Sea-Lark* headed farther east, and before long a considerable distance separated the sloop from the shore.

"I guess we had better not go much farther," he called out then. "It looks kind of hazy over there."

"Why, we can't be so far off Indian Head now, are we?" Martin queried. "Both of us wanted to have a look at it."

"There it is," replied Jack, pointing off on the port bow to a blur on the coast which was rendered vague by the slight haze.

"All right. You don't mind going up as far as that, do you?"

Jack hesitated a moment. The wind was so light now that it would barely be sufficient to carry them back over the tide, and Greenport harbor was fully seven or eight miles off.

"This is no power-boat, you know," he said, endeavoring to meet the wishes of the men in good part. "And I don't like that haze, either. It would n't surprise me a bit if there was a regular fog soon. I think we 'll turn back."

Hegan walked aft with his companion at his heels.

"Nothing doing!" he said in a tone which astounded the skipper. "Keep her going just as she is till you get orders from me."

"Orders!" Jack repeated. "If you talk like that I 'll dump you both out on the nearest

beach and leave you to get back as well as you can."

"No you won't," said Hegan with an ugly expression, drawing a small but wicked-looking revolver from his coat pocket and pointing it at Jack.

"Put that thing down and stop your nonsense!" said Jack, furious at such a liberty being taken. Rodney, taken aback for a moment by the suddenness of the men's change of front, recovered his self-possession and quietly reached down to the mast rail for one of the belaying-pins.

"*Drop that!*"

The words came from Martin like the crack of a whip as he swung around, and Rodney saw that he, too, was armed.

"Is this a joke?" Jack demanded, white to the lips. He was more than half inclined to let go the wheel and with one quick step forward push Hegan over the rail into the sea. But there was something about the man's manner that showed he meant to fire if he were not obeyed.

"Put that thing down and stop your nonsense"

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"Yes, just our little joke!" Hegan replied. "All the same, you won't see any fun in it if you don't do as you're told."

"There won't be any fun in for you either, soon," replied Jack, glancing over his shoulder. "Look at this fog-bank drifting up. We 're going to be in a nice fix."

"Just what I want," replied Hegan. "Now, take it calm, and p'r'aps you won't get hurt. I don't know that it would n't be best to thump you both on the top of the head and drop you overboard. Nice time you 've given us! ain't you?"

"Given *you?*"

"Never mind about that!" snapped Hegan. "The least said the soonest mended. Here, give me that wheel, and get for'ard. Keep 'em covered, Martin. This feller looks as though he was going to try to give us a bit o' trouble. What d'you say? Shall we make 'em swim for it? A two-mile swim on a day like this is good for any one." He laughed evilly.

"You stick to the program, Hegan," replied

Martin. "No killin'; that 's what we agreed on."

The edge of the fog-bank was already enveloping the sloop, and the coast-line was now hidden from view.

"But a nice little swim—" Hegan began.

"Shut up!" Martin snarled, losing his temper.

"All right," replied Hegan. "You always was a chicken-livered cuss, huh? Now, Captain, oblige me and my friend by steppin' for'ard up against your pal, so that if necessary Martin can chip bits off you both with that gun o' his."

"I won't do anything of the kind," replied Jack, pluckily, although he had an uncomfortable feeling that Hegan's revolver was pointed at the pit of his stomach.

"Guess you will," said Hegan, sneeringly, as he stepped back a few feet. "I'm going to count three. If you ain't makin' yourself scarce in that vicinity by the time I say 'three,' I 'll fire past you. I don't want to do any

killin', mind. I 'll fire to miss you the first time, but the second shot won't miss."

Jack stared stubbornly at the man, who, however, showed no signs of wavering. And the shining weapon in his hand was a painfully conclusive argument.

"One!" said Hegan.

Jack set his lips tightly but continued to hold on to the wheel.

"Two!"

"Three!"

There was a sharp report, and a bullet whizzed within a foot of Jack's head. It would have been sheer suicide to hold out any longer against such odds. The boy frowned and walked forward to where Rod was standing.

"Of course, if you 're going to do that sort of thing," he said, "you can have your own way just now. But you 'll have to smart for it later on."

Taking possession of the wheel, Hegan steered farther into the bewildering fog.

"Don't mind them, Martin," he said. "But

keep your eyes skinned, all the same, or they'll slip one over on you."

Although Jack had found discretion the better part of valor, he was by no means inclined to take his medicine lying down.

"You bet we will!" he declared truculently. "I was an idiot to let you come off with us, anyway! It was one of you two who tried to choke me in the cabin a little while back. I felt pretty certain of it all along. But after what the watchman told me yesterday I thought I must have been mistaken."

"I guess you 're right," said Hegan. "My friend Martin was to blame for that. He always makes a mess of things if I 'm not along to help him."

Martin's revolver went off, and Rod, who had again stooped quickly to pick up a belaying-pin, straightened himself with a jerk.

"Aw, *would* you!" grinned Martin. "Next time you try any of that stuff you 'll get hit; see?"

"What on earth do you chaps want?" Jack asked savagely. "You can't get away with

this sloop! I 'll have the fishermen hunting all along the coast for it."

The two men exchanged glances, and Hegan winked at his companion.

"Would n't they like to know?" he jeered.

"Keep your mouth shut," Martin growled warningly.

CHAPTER XVI

CAST ADRIFT

WHATEVER the intention of the two men was, their plans were now being affected by something they had not anticipated. The fog had blotted out everything except a comparatively small space of the ocean around them; and, to complicate matters still more, the sails of the *Sea-Lark,* after flapping lazily for a while, now began to hang limply. The faint breeze had died down entirely, and the sloop lay motionless.

"This ain't no good!" Hegan commented at length, addressing his companion. "Better set them two adrift in their dinghy."

"What do you want to do that for?" demanded the captain, heatedly. So long as he had both feet on the sloop's deck he stood at least some chance of defending his property.

"Don't ask questions," snapped Hegan. "Hop over the side, there."

With both Martin and Hegan covering them with revolvers, the lads had no alternative but to obey. They were in the dinghy and Martin still held the painter in his hand ready to cast it loose, when an idea occurred to Hegan.

"Pass me up those oars," he ordered.

Jack gave a sudden tug on the painter but did not succeed in dragging it from Martin's hand.

"Come down and get them yourself if you 're so anxious for the things," Jack retorted.

"You young varmint! Bound to give us as much trouble as you can, ain't you?" snarled Hegan, clambering over the side and nearly swamping the little dinghy—which was never made to hold more than two—as he gained possession of the oars.

"What did you expect me to do?" asked Jack. "Hand them up to you politely and then kiss you good-by? I suppose you fellows both know you 'll go to prison for this as soon as the police put their hands on you."

"They 've got to catch us first," grunted

Hegan as, with his foot on the prow of the dinghy, he pushed it off. It slid a few yards through the water and then lay still by the side of the *Sea-Lark* until a faint puff of wind fluttered the sails of the sloop and she drifted half a cable's length farther away.

"What in the name of goodness do you suppose those chaps did that for?" Jack exclaimed presently.

"They 've got some crazy notion of stealing the sloop, I guess," replied Rodney. "It *is* crazy, though. To begin with, they can't get far. They 'll have to put in at Baymouth or some other place within a few miles. And when we land it won't be half an hour before all the police along this part of the coast are looking out for them. They can't disguise her, and they won't have more than a few hours to sell her."

"I can't help thinking the same way that you do about it," replied Jack, laughing, for in spite of the unpleasantness of their position there was something utterly ludicrous and unex-

pected about it. "But we 're not ashore yet. Got no oars, remember."

"How far is the coast from here?"

Jack shrugged.

"A couple of miles, perhaps. I guess it can't be much more. I *think* it lies over there," he said, pointing vaguely into the bewildering mass of fog.

"*I* think it 's over here," declared Rod, pointing in nearly the opposite direction. "The sloop is—" He turned to glance in the direction of the sloop, but found the mist had swallowed her up.

"She 's over there," said Jack.

"No, she 's over there," Rod contradicted.

"What are you going by? The wind, or the sun?"

"Guesswork," owned Rod, realizing that in a dead calm, surrounded by fog, all points of the compass looked alike.

"We're stuck! That 's all there is to it," said Jack. "Nothing much can happen to us, though, as it 's such fine weather, barring the

fog. And that 's bound to lift soon. We can paddle ashore with our hands, on a pinch, as soon as we can see where we are."

But the fog continued to hang over the surface like a pall, and the boys waited with what patience they could muster, because, though by paddling with their hands they might be able to send the dinghy through the water at the rate of a mile an hour or even more, they were as likely as not to paddle her farther out to sea.

Suddenly Jack straightened up and put his head on one side, listening.

"What was that?" he asked.

"Did n't hear a thing," replied Rod.

"I did, though," declared the captain. "Listen!"

After a while a faint creaking sound came over the water.

"Hear it then?" Jack asked.

The other nodded. "What was it?" he queried, straining his ears afresh.

A smile came slowly to Jack's face.

"I believe it 's the sloop," he declared. "She 's stuck, anyway, the same as we are, you

know. Hegan and his pal will have to stay just where they are until a breeze happens along. And there has n't been more than a breath of air since they threw us out."

"It might be some other boat," Rod suggested.

"We 'll soon settle that," said Jack. "Ahoy, there! Ahoy!"

He knew that call must travel some distance in such still air, and when no answering hail was returned his suspicions were confirmed.

"Can't you picture them, as mad as a couple of hornets!" Jack chuckled. "They 've fallen into their own trap and they can't get out of it until a breeze comes."

"I suppose there 's no chance of paddling back alongside and catching them off their guard?" Rod suggested.

The captain frowned thoughtfully.

"I guess not," he said. "They 'll be getting the jumps soon. We 'd make a pretty good target, remember, if they started to take pot-shots at us. All the same, I 'm game if you are. It would be better than sitting here and doing

nothing. *There* she goes again! You heard? It 's the boom swinging in the swell. Here, what idiots we are!" he went on, stooping and lifting the floor boards of the dinghy. "What could you want better than these for paddles? Quietly, now! If they hear us coming we shall have no better chance than when we drifted away. I expect it will be no good, anyway, but I can't sit still doing nothing, much longer."

Judging as accurately as possible the direction of the sound that came across the water occasionally, they began to paddle softly, and within five minutes Jack held up a warning hand and pointed ahead, where the shape of the *Sea-Lark* loomed dimly.

For another twenty fathoms they urged the dinghy along, until it was possible to see the sloop distinctly. Contrary to Jack's expectation, there was nobody visible on deck. In such a dead calm it would have been useless for Hegan to stand by the wheel, but Jack was puzzled. The dinghy was now drawing near the vessel.

"I wonder if they 've—" Rod began in a

whisper; whereupon Jack silenced him with an imperative gesture. The sloop looked as though she had been abandoned, but as there was no small boat in which the men could leave her, that was obviously not the explanation. By signs only did Jack now communicate with his friend. Like a wraith, the dinghy slid under the *Sea-Lark's* bow. Motioning Rod to keep the little craft from bumping against the side of the sloop, Jack placed his hands on the deck and slowly drew himself up until he was aboard the *Sea-Lark* again, on his hands and knees. Still nobody challenged him. His pulse was beating a shade faster than usual as he crawled cautiously down the little alleyway between the deck-house and the low rail, for there was no disguising the fact that he was inviting trouble. There were two armed men, evidently entirely unscrupulous fellows, to contend with. If they suddenly saw him creeping along the deck, it was the most likely thing in the world that one of them would blaze away with his revolver.

Jack came near to the port-hole let into the side of the deck-house. By looking through

there he would be able to see the inside of the cabin. But unfortunately those inside the cabin stood an equally good chance of seeing him, with consequences distinctly unpleasant, if not painful. He could hear them now. They were evidently engaged in some dispute, for Hegan's raucous voice was raised in protest more than once, and he heard Martin say: "Well, hurry up, then."

There came, also, a peculiar sound as of dull blows and the straining of woodwork.

A wild hope had come into Jack's head, but in order to execute the plan which he hastily formed it became necessary for him to pass before the port-hole.

Cautiously he leaned forward until his eyes fell on the forms of the men inside. They had their backs turned toward him, and were intent on some work of destruction. In his hand Hegan held a short bar of steel, just such an implement as Jack had found on the cabin floor after the midnight struggle. With it he was tearing away one of the boards that formed the sheathing of the cabin. Several such boards

had already been ripped off and lay in splinters on the floor.

"I tell you it 's gone!" Martin exclaimed in an angry voice.

"And if it 's gone," retorted Hegan, turning toward his companion, with the bar of steel held menacingly in the air, "there 's only one person who could have taken it."

"What d' you mean?" demanded Martin.

"I mean just what I say. If you 've double-crossed me you won't get away with it. You 'll have me to reckon with. I know now why you did n't want to come off in the sloop to-day. I thought at first it was just because you were naturally scared o' anything bigger than a chicken. Now I got you!"

"I tell you I don't know a thing about it," Martin protested in whining tones. "Maybe it 's there, after all. Smash another board off."

Hegan returned to his task, and for a few minutes there was no sound beyond the rending of planks from the side of the cabin, and the creaking of rusted nails.

Suddenly Hegan gave a cry and put his hand down behind the sheathing.

"I see it!" he cried exultantly. "Just like we left it, too! Sort of misjudged you, did n't I? Guess you would n't have the pluck to double-cross a feller like me, though! Here it is, safe and sound!"

Then he drew from behind the sheathing the thing for which he had been seeking.

And Jack, watching through the port, saw the man's hand grasping the strange object of his search.

CHAPTER XVII

TRAPPED!

JACK had remained motionless, watching this strange spectacle, but he now crept noiselessly astern while the men were engaged with their discovery. Evidently they did not notice his form pass the port-hole, but the most critical part of his task lay ahead. If only he could reach the cockpit unobserved and fasten Hegan and Martin up in the cabin, the tables would, indeed, be turned.

The lad peered cautiously round the after end of the deck-house and his face brightened, for one of the doors was half closed. That gave him a chance to approach the companion-way without being seen. His movements, however, had to be slow, for any sudden jerk on the part of the sloop would instantly have aroused the suspicion of the men. He hardly breathed as he put one foot over the edge of the cock-pit

and upon the broad seat, his eyes glued the while on the doors, which swung outward. There was a bare chance that he might bang both of them to and fasten them before Hegan and Martin had time to interfere. It would be the work of an instant only, once he got near enough to accomplish his object, and the catch with which the closed doors could be fastened together was hanging down temptingly.

A fresh dispute had evidently arisen between the two men, for they were speaking angrily once more, and while they were so engaged the boy gently closed the half-open door. Then with a swift movement he reached across for the other door and closed it with a bang, snapping the catch across firmly.

Instantly an outcry arose in the cabin.

"Who 's there?" shouted Martin.

"Open that door!" yelled Hegan.

For answer Jack took a key from his pocket, slipped the padlock through the catch, and locked it.

"Come on, Rod," he called, springing back on deck from the cockpit and taking the

dinghy's painter aboard. "We 've got them!"

"What? How did you do it?" Rod asked, puzzled. His nerves had been sorely tried by an anxious wait of fully five minutes during which time anything might have happened at any moment.

"I shut the door on them, that 's all. They were asleep at the switch!"

"Hello, there! Open this door!" the two men were now shouting together.

"You stop where you are, and be quiet," Jack shouted back.

"Listen to me," Hegan called out. "What 's the idea of fastening us up? Can't you take a joke?"

"Oh, yes," said Jack. "Now it 's your turn."

"Well, this ain't funny," replied Hegan. "Just you open the door, an' we 'll call it quits."

"Not likely," said the boy. "I 'll open the door when we get back to Greenport and there 's a police officer to talk to you as you come out. Perhaps you can explain to him what you mean

by turning me off my boat and smashing my cabin up."

"If you don't let us out I 'll break the door open and then you 'll have real trouble on your hands!"

"They 'll have some difficulty in breaking that door open," said Rodney. "Meanwhile, look at that!" He pointed to the canvas which was again fluttering. "Pretty soon we 'll be able to sail back."

"Not till this fog lifts," replied Jack. "I 've got a compass, but it 's in the locker down there. *There* she comes," he added as a puff of wind swept over the sea. "This 'll soon blow the fog away."

The men below had been quiet for a few moments, evidently holding a council of war.

"Jack," Hegan called out at last.

"What do you want?"

"I want you to open this door and have a talk."

"You can talk where you are if you want to. I 'm listening."

"Yes, but I want to get out."

"I have told you I 'm not going to let you out."

"If you don't, it 'll be your funeral," declared Hegan. "Listen here, we made up our minds that we were n't going to hurt any one if we could help it."

"Well, you 're not hurting any one," retorted Jack, with a laugh.

"We will if we start shooting. We 've got plenty of cartridges left and they 'll go clean through this door. One of you may get killed, so I 'm giving you fair warning."

"I 'm willing to take a chance," replied Jack, moving from the companionway door, and seeking safety on deck. "You blaze away if it amuses you."

Immediately there came a muffled report from the interior of the cabin, and a bullet piercing the woodwork, sang its way over the stern of the sloop.

"Now, will you let us out?" Hegan demanded.

"Yes, very soon," replied Jack. "We 'll be in Greenport before long."

Another shot rang out, and Jack, who had taken hold of the wheel, gave a start as the bullet narrowly missed him. The breeze was freshening rapidly, and already he could dimly make out a portion of the coast-line, which gave the captain a general idea in which direction to steer. But to stand there and deliberately present himself as a target for the two ruffians in the cabin, had no appeal for him whatever. He slipped behind the wheel, and crouched down as low as possible, at the same time motioning Rodney to go forward, out of range.

"Don't take any chances, Rod," he advised.

The *Sea-Lark* was now leaning over gently before the breeze, and beginning to cut along slowly toward the harbor.

"They could n't hit a hay-stack in a passage," shouted Rodney, derisively, as he skipped into the bow.

Immediately a shot came flying through the forward end of the deck-house, and Rodney ducked behind the mast.

"Have you two had enough of it yet?" Hegan bawled.

"Keep her going, if it amuses you," replied Jack from his vantage-ground. "The more shots you fire now, the better I like it. All these holes in the side of the cabin will make the evidence against you lots worse."

"Don't be an idiot," said Hegan. "You 're only making it worse for yourselves when I get at you. I 'm going to shoot the lock off if you don't unfasten it, but I 'll keep a shot for you."

Jack knew well enough that this would prove no idle threat if the men did succeed in blowing the fastening off the door, and they would be able to do that easily enough if their ammunition held out. Still, it was something to be forewarned.

"Rod!" he called out, beckoning with his finger.

Rodney quickly came aft.

"I want you to take this wheel," Jack said. "Keep down as much as you can and they 'll never hit you."

"What are *you* going to do?"

"I 'm going to get ready with the boat-hook, in case they manage to break the door open,"

replied the other, grimly, as another shot came through the side of the cabin and buried itself in the woodwork of the cockpit. "See, they 've started to fire around the lock. It won't hold forever under that sort of treatment. If only we could keep them there another half-hour we should be round the end of the breakwater, but I 'm afraid they 'll smash their way out before that."

"You stick to the steering," said Rodney. "I 'll tackle them with the boat-hook."

"If you don't do as I tell you," said the captain, firmly, "I 'll swing her up into the wind, and we 'll lose time. Ouch!" he added, as another bullet whizzed past.

Reluctantly Rodney obeyed. Jack seized the boat-hook, and stood on the deck at the edge of the cockpit, ready for the struggle which he now felt was inevitable. It would still have been possible for him and his chum to get away in the dinghy, but the sloop was heading for harbor, and there was a tempting sporting chance for Jack to win out. Moreover, he was

by no means sure that if he and Rodney did get away in the dinghy Hegan and his confederate would allow them to escape scot-free, for the men could overtake the dinghy rapidly, now that a fresh breeze was filling the sails.

Two more shots rang out, and the door of the companionway became badly splintered.

"Are you going to let us out?" demanded Hegan's voice, in menacing tones.

Jack cautiously moved out of the way before replying.

"No, and if you put your head out you 'll get the boat-hook on top of it!" he shouted.

There was a brief pause, and then a heavy thumping began on the inside of the door. The men were using the table as a battering-ram. Jack moved nearer the cockpit again, and stood watching with misgiving the effects of the resounding blows. Suddenly Rodney gave a startled cry, at the same time pointing ahead.

Round the end of the breakwater, with all sails set, a fishing-schooner was coming.

"Starboard a bit, Rod, and cut her off," said

Jack. "Hegan, you 'd better stop that now," he added, raising his voice. "There 's a schooner coming."

This information was apparently far from good news to the two captives. The battering ceased momentarily, and three shots were fired in rapid succession at the lock, which almost broke away. When the shots ceased Jack leaped down into the cockpit, with the boat-hook raised above his head, ready to defend himself as the men broke out of the cabin, but the instant he landed in front of the door another bullet tore its way through the woodwork, and he felt a sharp, stinging pain in his leg, just above the knee. With an involuntary cry he clapped his hand to the injured place.

"Come and take the wheel," cried Rodney. "You 've been hit, have n't you?"

"Stop where you are. It 's nothing," replied Jack, gritting his teeth nevertheless as his leg began to throb. The boat-hook was but an indifferent weapon against men with loaded revolvers, but it seemed to Jack that the enemy would have only a few shots left, if any. The

"You 're too late, Hegan," he said

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sloop and the schooner, moreover, were now approaching each other rapidly. The fishing-vessel had gone about, and her present course was taking her almost straight toward the *Sea-Lark*. Another minute or so would bring the vessels within speaking distance. Rod was already signaling as best he could.

Below dock, the prisoners were again assailing the door, and blows fell with telling effect against the weakening lock. With poised boat-hook, Jack watched and waited. Suddenly, with a crash, the doors flew open and Hegan, his face contorted with rage, leaped up the steps.

"Drop that boat-hook!" he commanded savagely, his revolver pointing at Jack's breast. Behind him, Martin peered across his shoulder, his features set in a malicious grin.

Jack, backing away, pointed to the schooner. "You 're too late, Hegan," he said.

Hegan shot a quick glance over the water and then, with a snarl of rage, hurled his revolver straight at the boy's face. Jack ducked, but not in time to escape a glancing blow on the

top of the head, which sent him reeling back. Seizing his advantage, Hegan leaped forward, but Rodney with a final hail to the schooner, now close at hand, left the wheel and hurled himself on top of Hegan. His weight bore the man down, and Jack, recovering, steadied himself to meet a new onslaught which came from Martin. Clutching the barrel of his empty weapon, Martin aimed a blow, but Jack was before him and brought the boat-hook crashing down on the man's arm. The revolver dropped to the floor of the cockpit just as a deep voice came from the deck of the fishing-craft.

"Hello, there! Hello, there! What 's all this about?" It was Bob Sennet who spoke, and with flopping sails the *Ellen E. Hanks* nosed alongside the *Sea-Lark,* and the skipper, his huge hands bunched formidably, leaped to the deck of the sloop.

"You 're just in time, Captain," growled Hegan. "These young ruffians were nearly killing the pair of us."

Bob Sennet's eyes fell on the dark mark on Jack's trousers, which were already badly

stained from his wound. From there his gaze traveled to the revolver at Martin's feet. Jack, now that the worse of the excitement was over, was feeling curiously weak. He sank down on the cockpit seat, and hoped fervently that he was not going to do anything so foolish as faint. It was as though a red-hot iron was being bored into his leg, and he felt absurdly dizzy.

"Give me that gun," the fisherman demanded of Martin, who picked up the weapon and handed it over.

Hegan made a movement in the direction of the dinghy, whereupon Bob Sennet strode forward, took him by the collar, and flung him roughly into the bottom of the cockpit.

"So these two boys were nearly killing the pair of you, were they!" the burly fisherman said. "I 've seen one of 'em at the wheel for the last five minutes. The other has a boat-hook in his hand, and a bullet in his leg, if I 'm not mistaken. That yarn don't go with me, and it won't go with the police. Have they another gun, Jack?" he demanded suddenly.

"They had, but Hegan threw it at me when

it was empty, and it must have gone overboard."

"What 's their game?"

"I don't quite know, Captain Sennet," replied Jack, "but I 'd be very much obliged if you 'd help us back to Greenport."

"You bet I will! Now, then, you two," he went on addressing Hegan and Martin, "get onto the schooner. Nearly killing the pair of you, were they? A fine yarn! Hey! What in *thunder!*" Captain Sennet's head went forward and his eyes widened in astonishment as he saw the broken, bullet-torn doors of the companionway. "Has somebody gone *crazy!*" he added.

Jack was by now in a state of semi-collapse, and the fisherman, picking him up, laid him gently on the deck of the sloop.

"They turned us adrift in the dory," Rodney explained, "but there was n't any wind, so we were able to paddle alongside again and Jack slipped aboard and fastened them up in the cabin."

"Well, I dunno," said Captain Sennet, "but

by rights you two ought both to be dead now, 'cording to what 's been going on. Joe," he called out, raising his voice and addressing the mate on board the schooner, "tie those two beauties up good and tight, or they might get away from you yet. Now pass a line aboard here, and beat it back to the harbor."

In a few minutes the schooner was heading for Greenport, with the *Sea-Lark* in tow, and Captain Sennet was standing, amazed, amid the scene of wreckage in this little cabin of the sloop.

"Say!" He pushed his cap back and rubbed his head perplexedly, addressing Rodney. "For the love of Mike, will you just tell me what them fellers have been up to in here? Half the sheathing is torn down! They must ha' gone clean crazy. Why—" Suddenly he stopped and his jaw dropped, as, turning round and glancing on to one of the bunks, he saw something which took away his breath.

"What in *thunder!*" he began; and then, with a broad smile he leaned over the bunk and fingered his discovery.

"Money!" exclaimed Rodney.

"Some one must ha' been robbing a bank!" laughed Captain Sennet. "Fives—tens—twenties! Ho, ho! I reckon that accounts for some o' the milk in this particular cocoanut. Let 's put it in that thing," he went on, picking up a canvas bag and stowing the pile of paper currency and coins into it. "Guess I 'll take charge o' this till we find whose it is," he added, dropping the bag into his pocket.

Back on deck, he gave his attention to Jack.

"We 'll have you in a doctor's hands soon," he said. "Much pain?"

"Not too much," said Jack, with a grimace. "My head hurts most. I don't think the bullet wound amounts to much."

"Let 's have a look at it," said the fisherman, rolling up the boy's trouser leg and displaying a clean wound in the flesh about four inches above the knee. The bullet had entered the flesh at the front and passed out again at the back without touching the bone. Rodney produced a handkerchief, and the skipper bathed the injury with sea-water.

"Never mind if it smarts a bit," he said. "You want it clean, anyway. There 's no great harm done there, though it 's a mystery to me how you both got off as lightly as you did, with all that lead flying around.

"Had you got any money hidden in that cabin o' yours, Jack?" he asked, after binding up the wound with the handkerchief.

"Money?" the lad asked. "There was about eighty cents in my coat pocket. That 's all I know of."

"I mean a pile o' money."

"A pile?" asked the captain of the *Sea-Lark*. "I know there was n't any other money in the place. I *ought* to know."

"That 's just what you *did n't* know," replied the fisherman. "I think I begin to understand it, though. You 've seen that mess those fellers have made o' the inside o' the cabin?"

"I saw that through the port-hole."

Captain Sennet drew the canvas bag from his pocket.

"This must ha' been what they were after,"

he said. He held it out and Jack examined it curiously. On its side was printed "Barker and Holden."

"I don't understand," said the boy, opening the bag, and looking in puzzlement at the bills and coin within.

"You don't know anything about it, do you, Rod?"

"Never saw it before in my life," answered Rodney, blankly. "Whose is it?"

"I don't know," said Jack. "I don't understand it at all!"

"No, nor me, neither," said the fisherman. "Leastwise, I ain't got the proper hang of it, but I 've got a notion, just the same. You say these two men set you adrift in the dinghy?"

Jack nodded.

"And then as soon as your backs were turned they started to strip off all the sheathing o' the cabin?"

"Why, yes. And I saw Hegan put his hand behind one of the boards and lift this bag out."

"Then," declared Captain Sennet, logically, "if they went after this they must ha' knowed

it was there, and if they did *they must ha' been the ones who put it there!* Who else could ha' knowed where it was, besides them as put it there?"

Jack sat up suddenly, with a most astounding idea in his head. "I 'm going to count it," he announced.

"Count it, eh?" said Bob Sennet. "All right. Might as well know what we 've got."

Eagerly Jack emptied the contents of the sack upon the seat and, with the others watching curiously, counted bills and coins. At last, "Twelve hundred and forty dollars!" he cried excitedly. "Just what I suspected! Don't you see, Captain?"

Bob Sennet shook his head. "Can't say I do, Jack. Guess you 'd better tell me."

"Why—why, this is the money my father was robbed of three years ago!"

"What!" exclaimed Rodney. "But how did it get here?"

"I don't know, but—"

"I do," interrupted the captain of the *Ellen E. Hanks.* "Those sculpins put it here."

"But—but when? The *Sea-Lark's* been lying over on the dunes for two years or more!"

"Well, what of it?" asked Bob Sennet. "Was n't nothing to keep them from going over there and dropping the bag behind the cabin sheathing, was there? If they wanted to hide it that was a pretty good place, was n't it? And—why, look here, Jack, maybe these fellows is the ones that stole the money from your father!"

"I wonder!" said Jack. "Anyway, it 's all a puzzle to me. Why should the men have hidden it on the *Sea-Lark?* And if they did hide it there, why did n't they take it away again during all the time the sloop lay on the dunes?"

Bob Sennet shook his head in perplexity. "Now 's the time to find out, if it ever is to be found out," he said as the schooner's sails dropped and she sidled toward her usual berth, much to the surprise of those who had seen her put to sea a short time before.

"What 's amiss?" Cap'n Crumbie shouted from Garnett and Sayer's wharf, seeing the

sloop towing astern and Bob Sennet aboard of her.

"Telephone to the police station," replied Captain Sennet, "and tell the chief he 's wanted down here, quick. I want to get off to sea as soon as I can."

The watchman delivered the message, and shortly afterward the chief stepped on board the *Ellen E. Hanks,* where the crew were standing expectantly in a group. Jack, limping painfully, had joined them, determined to see the thing through now. Rodney and Cap'n Crumbie had also gone on to the schooner as a matter of course.

"What is it?" asked the chief as he stepped off the wharf.

"There 's two men trussed up in the cabin, who are going to prison for several years, if I 'm any judge," replied the skipper. "Theft, and usin' firearms, and goodness knows what else. We happened along just when they were in the thick of it. Afore you go down and take a squint at 'em I want to tell you all I know."

"Go ahead," replied the chief, alert and

ready to grasp the essential points of the case. Bob Sennet briefly told of all he had seen, and showed the bag of money to the police official, who raised his eyebrows in astonishment.

"And you say there 's just twelve hundred and forty dollars there! That must be the stolen bag, all right," he said. "This explains a lot that we did n't rightly understand before." The latter remark was addressed to Jack. "But the robbery took place a long time ago, and we may have difficulty in fastening the guilt on these men, even if they are the actual culprits, unless one of them can be made to confess. However, I may be able to work it. Men of that kind have no scruples when it comes to saving their own skins. Bring them up on deck one at a time."

A minute later the man known as Martin was ushered into the presence of the chief. The latter looked at him curiously for a brief space, and then smiled grimly.

"Hello, Whitey," he said. "Going by the name of Martin now, are you, eh? Have n't seen you for quite a while."

"My name ain't White," the man blustered.

"It used to be. It was, anyway, when you and your pal were arrested at Baymouth for burglary, and you were both sent to prison for three years. You only got out a while back, didn't you?"

"Well, what about it?" demanded White, in a surly manner, seeing that further denial was useless.

"Only this, that I 'm afraid you 'll have to go back again, and for a longer spell this time."

"What for?" asked White. "We 've only been defending ourselves against these boys."

"That yarn won't go," replied the chief. "The captain of this schooner saw too much for you to get out of it. But I 'm not talking about to-day's affair. It 's something else you 'll stand trial for."

"I haven't done anything," growled the man.

"Haven't, eh? What about knocking down Sam Holden three years ago and getting away with twelve hundred dollars? Forgotten all about that, have you?"

"I was n't in on that. You can't prove—"

"How 'd you come by the money, then?" snapped the chief.

White darted a glance at the stern faces encircling him and moistened his lips.

"It was Hegan hit him," he blurted.

"How do you know?"

"I saw him," White floundered.

"Thank you," said the chief, ironically. "That is just what I wanted to be sure of. What happened after the pair of you got away with the money?"

Again White looked round appealingly to those near, and hesitated.

"You 'd better come across," urged the chief. "We 've got you, remember, and you can't squirm out of it. You must have hidden the money in the cabin of the sloop at once, because it was only the next day that you and Hegan were arrested at Baymouth, and you 've been in the prison since then, until very recently. It may make it easier for you if you tell me the truth now."

White shrugged his shoulders.

"It was n't me hit Holden on the head, remember," he said. "I was against that sort of thing all along. Hegan found out that this man Holden sometimes took a lot of money down to his house instead o' leaving it at the office in the safe. We waited for Holden in the street, and Hegan laid him out. We 'd seen this sloop lying off the wharves and so when we had the money we slid down there and got aboard her. We were afraid to wait around at the station for a train. We did n't want the sloop, mind you. All we wanted was to get away, and we thought we might make some place up the coast around Baymouth, run the sloop ashore, and foot it for the railroad. Hegan had the bag of money when we went aboard, and the first thing he did was to look for some place where it would n't be found if the cops got us. One of the boards was so as we could pry it loose at the top and he shoved the bag behind it. It was pretty rough when we got outside and I was for turning back, but Hegan would n't agree to that, and we headed up the shore. Things got pretty bad and I

made sure we 'd both be drowned, as I did n't know much about sailing and Hegan was n't a whole lot better at it. The gale got us off Indian Head and we were nearly swamped. Our bit of sail went and next thing we knew we were drifting up the river. After a while she ran on a sand-bank and the waves came right across her deck. We tried to get hold of the bag, but it had slipped down where we could n't reach it. We were fairly scared by that time and so we left it and swam ashore, somehow, meaning to go back next morning. But we did n't, because that same night the cops nabbed us both for the old burglary. I got three years and so did Hegan. Soon as I was out I beat it back here to get the money, but young Jack Holden was running the sloop and I could n't find a chance. Then Hegan showed up and we went after it together."

"I see," said the chief. "That accounts for the yarns about folks prowling around on the sloop at night."

"I don't know anything about that," declared the prisoner.

"Now, White, it 's no use your denying it. There was n't anybody but you and Hegan who had reason to attack those lads in that cabin."

White shook his head, however, and would not further commit himself.

"When did you get that tear in your trousers?" the chief asked, pointing to a very amateurish patch.

"A long time ago," White said.

"Mended it yourself, did n't you?"

"Guess I did. Why?"

"Nothing, only I guess I know why you did n't take it to a tailor. Wanted to keep it quiet, did n't you? A little bit of the cloth was missing, eh?"

"I don't know," said White.

"But I do. Jack Holden showed it to me. He found it on a nail where you 'd left it one night. By itself it was n't much of a clue, but it fits in nicely now. Here, Wilson," the chief added, turning to a policeman who had accompanied him, "take this man to the station and lock him up. Now for the other fellow."

Hegan was still full of fight when brought

on deck, but he quieted down as soon as he saw the game was hopelessly up.

"Well, Hegan," the chief began, "you soon got into trouble again after being released, didn't you? White told us all about it. You 're both going to be the guests of the Government for some little time. There 's one thing I want you to tell me, though. Was it you or your pal who used to sneak down on to the sloop nights while she was lying at the wharf?"

"If it had been me," replied Hegan, scornfully, "you bet we would n't ha' been in this fix now. I 'd have got the money and been off. Whitey 's afraid of his own shadow."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CANVAS BAG

HALF an hour after Hegan had followed his confederate from the schooner to jail, Jack was lying in bed, joking with the doctor who was bandaging his wound, the pain in which was much easier now that it had been properly dressed.

"How about the Ferry?" the lad asked. "May n't I get up to-morrow morning?"

"No," replied the man of medicine firmly. "You 'll have to stay put for at least a couple of days. Fortunately it 's only a slight wound, but you must give it a chance to heal. You 'll be all right in a week, anyway. Now, promise me you won't try to stand on that game leg till Tuesday morning."

"All right, if you insist," replied Jack. "Hello, Dad, is that you?" he added, raising his voice as the street door opened. He had

not seen his father since returning from the astonishing trip in the *Sea-Lark*, for Mr. Holden had gone off on his usual Sunday-morning walk.

Pantingly Mr. Holden hurried up the stairs.

"What 's wrong with you, boy?" he asked as he entered the room. "I 've just heard outside that you 've been shot."

"It 's only a scratch," replied Jack. "The doctor says I 'll probably be able to get up to-morrow."

"Tuesday," the kindly old doctor corrected, trying to look severe and making a complete failure of it. "If you get out of bed to-morrow I 'll chloroform you and amputate both legs. Don't worry about him, Mr. Holden. He 'll be all right. Healthy flesh like his soon heals, but I want to give it a fair start. Good morning, Jack. Tuesday, mind! Good morning, Mr. Holden."

Mr. Holden looked white as he sat on the edge of his son's bed, for he was not yet over the shock of the news.

"Tell me about it, Jack," he said.

Jack smiled.

"I will in a minute, Dad," he replied. "But I have a little surprise for you first. You remember the night when you were robbed of that money?" Jack thrust his hand beneath his pillow, and felt a canvas bag that lay concealed there.

"Certainly, Jack," Mr. Holden answered.

"Have you ever had any hope of getting it back?"

Mr. Holden shook his head slowly. "Not after the first few days," he replied gloomily.

"You 'd be tickled to death, then, if it turned up now?"

"Don't talk foolishly, lad. Such things don't happen."

"But if it did, Dad? What would you do?"

Mr. Holden would have preferred not to discuss the painful matter, but to humor his son, he rested his chin on his hands and thought for a while.

"Well," he said at length, a twinkle coming into his eyes. "I 'd ask you to let me put your salvage money with it, and—"

"Salvage money? I 'm afraid Mr. Barker does n't mean to pay a cent of that," the boy declared. "He ought to, according to the law, but the law does n't seem to be everything."

The twinkle was still in Mr. Holden's eyes

"That 's where you 're wrong, boy," he said. "The law does amount to a great deal. I met Mr. Merrill while I was out walking this morning, and he 's just told me something you 'll be glad to hear."

"About the—the salvage?"

Mr. Holden nodded.

"What did he say?" Jack asked eagerly.

"That Mr. Barker has decided to pay the whole amount rather than go to court," announced the boy's father, triumphantly.

Jack stared, for that was the last thing he had expected. Then he began to laugh, for he still had his own good news to tell.

"Yes," Mr. Holden went on, "he 's going to hand the check over next week. Yesterday was the last day Mr. Merrill gave him before taking the matter to court, and as Mr. Barker knew he would have to pay in the long run, he went

round to the lawyer's house last night and tried to make a dicker. But Mr. Merrill held out until he got a promise that the whole amount would be paid."

"Really?" exclaimed Jack. "That 's fine! We 'll be as rich as—as anything, sha'n't we?"

"Well, you will, son."

"And so will you! I mean—" Jack pulled himself up and made a new start: "You were saying that if you got back the money that was stolen you 'd put the salvage money with it, were n't you? And then what?"

"Why, in that case— But why talk about it, Jack? That sort of miracle is n't likely to happen."

"But—but suppose it did," Jack insisted. "Suppose it had!"

Mr. Holden shook his head, smiling sadly. "Then I think I 'd go back into business again, son," he answered.

"How?" the boy asked eagerly, rising on his elbow.

"I 'd go into partnership with Garnett and Sayer. Mr. Garnett told me only a couple of

weeks ago that he 'd be willing to let me buy a small interest for fifteen hundred dollars. But he might as well have said fifteen thousand."

Jack's fingers tightened on the canvas bag underneath the pillow, and he drew it slowly forth.

"Have you ever seen this before?" he asked, holding out the long missing article in question.

"Why, *Jack!*" Mr. Holden looked from the bag to his son's merry face. "Where did that come from?"

"Open it, Dad!"

With trembling fingers Mr. Holden obeyed, and his gaze fell on the contents.

"There 's none missing," said the boy, unable to keep up the game any longer. "And it was on my sloop all the time!"

"I—I don't understand!" said Mr. Holden.

"Of course you don't!" laughed Jack. "It kept us all guessing for a long while." And then he explained everything, while his father, the precious bag of money on his knees, listened.

"When those two men go to prison for the

theft—and they are going—" he concluded, "your name will be cleared completely, Dad, won't it?"

"Aye," replied Mr. Holden. "Even Barker won't be able to insinuate things then."

There came a rap at the street door, and George and Rodney came hurrying up the stairs. "Well, they have n't spoilt your beauty, anyway," exclaimed George. "I was afraid you 'd got your nose shot off or something. How 's your leg?"

"Nothing much wrong," replied Jack. "I 'll be on board again by Tuesday, but I 've got to stop in bed till then."

"You 'd better let George and me run the ferry for a day or two," said Rodney. "You see if we don't do a roaring business. The story 's got all over the place by now, and half the town has been down to look at the bullet holes on the sloop. Everybody will want to run across in the *Sea-Lark* to-morrow."

"Go to it," replied Jack. "That 's fine!"

Mr. Holden, bearing his miraculously restored money, slipped from the room and the visitors

perched themselves on Jack's bed, and George, frankly disgusted at having missed the adventure, insisted on hearing a full and detailed account of it. Jack acted as chief historian and Rodney saw to it that he left nothing out, and when they had ended George shook his head regretfully.

"Just my luck to get left out of it," he said. "But I suppose that if I 'd been along those thugs would n't have tried anything."

"You hate yourself, don't you?" laughed Rodney.

"Well, with three of us instead of two—"

"George is right," said Jack. "They would n't have faced such odds, I guess."

"Would n't they?" demanded Rodney. "They went out to get that money back, and they 'd have managed it somehow. Maybe they 'd have acted nastier than they did. By the way, Dad and the rest of them said I was to tell you how sorry they are, you know, and —and all that. And Dad told me this morning that if you want a place in his office when you

get through school you can have it. Wish you 'd take it, because I 'll have a chance of seeing you now and then."

"That 's mighty kind of him," answered Jack, gratefully, "and I guess I 'd love to try it. I wish you 'd thank him for me, Rod. I 'll see him myself as soon as the doctor lets me out, but I 'd like him to know that I appreciate his—his offer."

"All right, Captain. I 've got to beat it now. I 'll be in again to-morrow to see how you 're getting along. Don't worry about the ferry. George and I will keep it moving, all right!"

When the boys had gone Mr. Holden came back, and Jack, who had been doing some thinking in the meanwhile, greeted him with a question. "Dad," he asked, "how much is twelve and five?"

"Why, seventeen! Or it was when I went to school." Mr. Holden was in high spirits and laughed gayly at his little joke. "Why, son?"

"Well, I was thinking, Dad. If you take that five hundred and put it with the twelve—"

"I don't know that I ought to, Jack. Maybe it would be safer for you to put your money in the bank—"

"Nonsense! Of course you 're going to take it! Gee! look at all the money you 've spent on me!"

"Well, I 'd pay it back gradually, son, and—"

"Don't want it! Besides, as I figure it, you won't need all of it, anyway, will you?"

"Why, no, only three hundred, or maybe three-fifty."

"Great! That 'll leave a hundred and fifty, then. And I know a bully way to spend that!"

"To spend it?" asked his father, dubiously. "Don't you think that maybe you 'd better—er—save it, son?"

"I didn't mean spend exactly: I meant invest. You see, Dad, the ferry has done pretty well this summer and I guess it 'll do even better next year, because there are more folks coming here every season. Rod's father has offered me a job when I 'm through school and I think I 'd like to accept it, but he probably won't want me until fall, and so I might as well

keep on with the ferry. Don't you think so?''

''Why—why, yes. You 've made a good deal of money with it.''

''Yes. And even if I was n't here all summer George could run it for me and I 'd still make on it. But what the *Sea-Lark* needs, Dad, is an engine—just a two-cylinder motor that 'll kick her back and forth, wind or no wind. And I know where I can get a perfectly good second-hand one for a hundred and twenty-five, maybe less. So that 's where the rest of that salvage money is going, Dad. I 'm going to invest it in Holden's Ferry.''